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Chair

The Honourable Larry Bagnell

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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● (1230)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Li. ood afternoon. This is the 107th meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. We are in public now.

After we deal with Blake's motion, the clerk definitely needs some serious feedback if we're going to travel. We have to finalize a lot of arrangements and get some feedback to the clerk on the rest of the process on this bill.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I want to wait until Blake's motion. But are you talking about the Scott Brison motion?

The Chair: Whatever he's going to raise now. It's up to Blake.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Chair, I'll ask for a bit of advice from our clerk, because the problem that now arises in my understanding is that the deadline for us to confirm the appointment of a new CEO or not is June 7. Is that correct?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Andrew Lauzon): Pursuant to the Standing Orders, it's up to the House to ratify.

Mr. Blake Richards: We can make a recommendation as to our thoughts can we not, if we choose?

The Clerk: The House can ratify the appointment without any input from the committee, independently of the appointment.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes.

The Clerk: The Standing Order reads the committee may study the nomination for up to 30 calendar days, which takes us to June 7.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. So if we wanted to have the House consider anything that we had to say it would have to be done prior to that date.

The Clerk: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Blake Richards: That does present a bit of a problem, obviously, given the suggestions and discussions that took place last night about travelling next week. That would put us into a position where....

I guess the government in trying to rush through this elections bill, which they waited forever on, puts us in a position where we're not giving that bill anywhere near the due justice it deserves. I would argue, frankly, based on what's before us there, that we're not going to do our jobs properly as legislators on that piece of legislation. It simply is not going to happen. The fact of the matter is that we will not be meeting what I would say is our proper duty as legislators on that bill. At the same time, we are also going to say that we're not going to meet our proper duty as members of this committee in dealing with an appointment for a new Elections Canada CEO. If we put ourselves in a position to travel next week, we will be left with a situation where we actually cannot perform our duties by having the Minister of Democratic Institutions come and speak to the process.

This really, really is troublesome to me. Actually, I'll be frank that I'm at a little bit of a loss as to what to even suggest. That said, I suppose I'll still bring forward the motion and move it here. As a committee, I guess we can try to decide how best to deal with that. I think it's a travesty, frankly, that we're not going to give either one of these things due justice, but that's the reality. If the government chooses to force through this motion that they handed around to us last night, then that's the reality we're faced with. I guess we'll see how that goes.

Having said that, we can move this, and I will have some amendments to make to it. The reality of the situation is that some things have changed since the notice of motion was given. I'll get to those in a second. At the end of the day, I think we should still be trying to do our proper duty here. If the efforts that are being made by the government to ram through their Bill C-76 prevent us from doing our jobs properly not only on that legislation but also on this motion, and therefore the appointment of the CEO, I think at the very least we still should undertake to do our duty properly even if it is after the fact, which would be significantly unfortunate.

Having said that, I'll read the motion that I gave notice of, and then I will suggest what I think are the appropriate amendments. The notice of motion was the following:

> That the Committee invite the Acting Minister of Democratic Institutions, Scott Brison, to appear within two weeks of the adoption of this motion, to answer questions regarding the appointment of a new Chief Electoral Officer, for no less than two hours, and that this meeting be televised.

There's an obvious amendment required here. I was unaware that the minister would be returning so shortly after this notice of motion was given. It was my mistake. I probably should have just used the title of the minister, and of course the acting minister would have come in place of the minister. I did not do that, and therefore I'll make that amendment now.

The amendment would change "Acting Minister of Democratic Institutions, Scott Brison" to "Minister of Democratic Institutions". It would be replacing that wording for obvious reasons.

I'll make that motion for the amendment first, I guess.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

● (1235)

Mr. Scott Reid: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I just want to find out if someone can amend their own motion in this manner. Do you have to get unanimous consent of the committee? How does it work?

The Clerk: Normally, the person moving the motion would not be able to amend their own motion.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

In that scenario, then, I'll move the motion as it stands and hope that one of my colleagues will take up the challenge to make the amendment for me.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm assuming that the motion is now moved and you've finished your remarks.

Mr. Blake Richards: Well, I would ask to be put back on the list, because I'd like to speak to it again, after the amendment is moved.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay.

I move the amendment that the words "Scott Brison" be struck out and that "Karina Gould" be—

Mr. Blake Richards: Actually, it would be all of that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Oh, right. Sorry.

Mr. Blake Richards: Replace "Acting Minister of Democratic Institutions, Scott Brison".

Mr. Scott Reid: I'll just read it. It will now read like this:

> That the committee invite the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Karina Gould, to appear within two weeks of the adoption of this motion, to answer questions regarding the appointment of a new Chief Electoral Officer, for no less than two hours, and that this meeting be televised.

As the proposer of the amendment, if I may speak to it briefly, I would say that obviously this was done with good intentions, not realizing that Ms. Gould would be back as minister. I didn't know she was coming back as minister until I actually saw her in the House. I was very glad to see her back for a whole pile of reasons. First, I like her. Second, I think she understands this legislation better than Scott Brison does, and I mean no disrespect to Scott. He's a very smart guy and he at least pretends to like me, which warms the cockles of my heart, obviously.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Is this part of the motion?

Mr. Scott Reid: No, but this is a public meeting and I want to make sure that people know how much Scott Brison likes me.

Mr. Blake Richards: That should get you re-elected, I think.

Mr. Scott Reid: It should put me over the top in my riding.

Obviously, he didn't design the legislation. We know from the Chief Electoral Officer's comments yesterday that he was in consultation with the department back when Karina Gould was the minister in charge, so Scott wouldn't have known all of that stuff. He does have other duties as well. It's a lot to ask of anybody, especially with a voluminous piece of legislation like this. Obviously, with regard to all of those things, it's helpful to have Karina back. I wanted to make that clear.

The Chair: Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: What I meant was that I wanted to be on the speaking list for the main motion if the amendment was to pass.

The Chair: Okay.

On the amendment, Mr. Bittle is next on the list.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): I'll wait for the main motion.

The Chair: There appear to be no more comments on this difficult amendment, so we'll vote on the amendment.

(Amendment agreed to)

The Chair: On the motion as amended, go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

I do want to speak to the motion itself. I appreciate the indulgence of everyone on that. It was obviously a mistake on my part to have done it that way to begin with, and now we've resolved that.

We had the task of taking a look at whether we would agree or confirm or give our recommendation to the House that the appointment be made. That duty is something we as a committee should take quite seriously. We have that duty.

In that spirit, we had the chosen appointee—sorry, it was the second appointee chosen. The first one, for some mysterious reason, was withdrawn. It seems that no one is yet aware of why that is, including, to my understanding, the person who was actually the original appointee. It's a very odd circumstance, to say the least, and is certainly suspicious. I would think that the minister would want the opportunity to clarify what occurred, what happened and why. I would think that would help us in determining whether the right decision was, in fact, made.

When the person who has been chosen, the acting CEO, has been before our committee, I've always been satisfied with his level of knowledge and so on, so that's not of concern to me. Certainly we want to make sure the right decision was made with regard to this appointment. Part of the right decision being made is ensuring that the process was proper and fair. When there is something as odd as what occurred in this situation in a process, that is in doubt.

It may well be that there is nothing all that odd or suspicious to the situation at all, but there's only one way to find that out and that's to ask. Obviously, the best person to do that with is the minister. That is the reason I am making this suggestion.

I'm obviously aware of the logistical challenges that are now created by the government trying to ram through this piece of legislation, Bill C-76, but I'm hopeful we can find some way to undertake this and do it properly. It would only make sense. I would certainly hope that all members of this committee would support it.

● (1240)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I'll speak very briefly to the motion.

I appreciate where Blake is coming from, but with respect to privacy and privacy legislation, the minister can only comment on the individual who has been appointed in seeking the House to vote on that. It would be two hours of "I can't comment on that because of privacy legislation," and that's of no value to this committee. That's why I can't support the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I had actually not meant to get back on the speakers list, but do I need to comment on that.

We have no way of knowing and I don't think we will wind up knowing, but perhaps there are privacy considerations relating to private information appertaining to either the initial appointee to this position, Mr. Boda from Saskatchewan, or some other individual being referenced here. However, given the giant gas cloud of it all being a big secret, the fog bank of "Gosh, we can't tell you anything", to say it's unhelpful is putting it mildly.

I think it's designed to prevent us from doing our jobs. It may be designed in a way that is actually not permissible, but how do we know, since it's all a big fog bank of secrecy? The bigger the fog bank of secrecy, the bigger the curtain behind which the guy with the levers is doing his job—that's a reference to *The Wizard of Oz*, by the way—and the more the munchkins will be fooled and impressed by his or her ostensible grandeur.

Just to be clear, that was actually in reference to me, not to anybody else.

I do think that's an issue. There are many things the minister could share with us that, in my experience, much as I like her, she has not been sharing with us. As we saw just yesterday, by way of example, she didn't say "no comment", but she found other words with which to say "no comment" or that she wasn't going to answer a question. Her words were, "I'm here and prepared to answer questions about the substance of the bill", not about the timing of the bill, not about the rush to get the bill through.

The fact is, the decision to rush the bill through is one made at the cabinet level, and there was only one person in the room who was a member of cabinet and had any say in it, who had an awareness of what was being done or would have a chance to take the views of the committee back to the cabinet, who was involved in the drafting and scheduling of the legislation, the timing that caused it to come out so late. Having to rush this bill through the House by June 12 would have been an easy matter had the bill been developed, say, a year earlier, or six months earlier, and had it been divided into several slices so that the package we'd get at this late date would be much smaller. Several other pieces of the legislation, containing other elements of the bill, had been dealt with at some earlier time, and lest anyone make the claim that this could not have been done, I note that Bill C-33 was introduced some months ago.

● (1245)

Mr. Blake Richards: I believe it was almost a year ago.

Mr. Scott Reid: It might even be more than a year ago.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It was 18 months ago.

Mr. Scott Reid: It was introduced 18 months ago.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Who's counting, though?

Mr. Scott Reid: I think Maryam Monsef was the minister at the time, and the idea that the government might be introducing electoral reform was still a live issue at the time. Indeed, at that time, we were being told repeatedly by the Prime Minister and the then minister, Maryam Monsef, that they were firm, that 2015 would be the last election conducted under first past the post. It almost seems like talking about an ancient species that existed at the same time as the dinosaurs and remains unchanged to this very day when we talk about Bill C-33. Yet it sat there, unchanged, unmoved. Some of its provisions are contained in this law and would not be part of this ginormous bill if they'd been passed then.

The creation of an artificial crisis is something that is very relevant. Now coming back to the other artificial crisis created by the weird way in which one candidate was put forward and another was not does not convince me very much.

I note that in Mr. Bittle's comments—and I suspect this is precisely the sort of thing that makes Scott Brison not like him very much—he didn't say, "So the minister can't make it for two hours. I therefore am going to amend it to one hour, because instead of having all this empty space, we think there's enough to fill one hour instead of two."

With that in mind, Mr. Chair, I'm going to see if that would make the whole thing more palatable to the Liberals, and I therefore move to amend this motion by removing the words "no less than two hours", and change them to "no less than one hour" and see what happens in terms of Liberal acceptance of the motion when it's worded that way.

The Chair: Okay, on the amendment.

Mr. Cullen on the main motion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: This is kind of a mess of the government's own making, and I'm not referring to members here who are not in cabinet; it wasn't your decision. This is an officer of Parliament, and the rules require that, when an officer of Parliament is appointed or suggested, there are consultations with the other parties. That never happened. It didn't happen on the languages commissioner, which ended up blowing up in the government's face. It didn't happen in any of the other officers of Parliament, nor did it happen with Mr. Boda's nomination, nor did it happen with this recent nomination. All we're left with is confusion.

The interest I have more so is in the government explaining publicly what the consultation process actually was. I know what it was from our point of view. It was a letter, "Here's our nominee, you've been consulted." Two weeks later, "Here's our other nominee. Congratulations, you've been consulted again." It's laughable in its incomprehension and lack of respect. You talk about respect for these nominees, who are high-profile people with long, distinguished careers. It's not laughable in the sense of what these people are supposed to do, which is to govern our elections for 10 years in this case, audit the government for many years, and be the environmental assessment people for our country.

I take it quite seriously, and David Christopherson, who normally occupies this chair, takes it even more seriously than I do. We've made recommendations to the government of a better process that would consult with the opposition. By the way, that would innoculate the government, if we're interested in that, from the accusations that come by simply not consulting and being arrogant about it. Pardon my accusation, but it's true.

My interest is not saying what was wrong with Mr. Boda. I don't know what's happened to his reputation, but he was the nominee and then suddenly he wasn't.

I had a government member accuse me of leaking his name, by the way, which was ironic, since the leak came out of the office of the Minister of Democratic Institutions, but never mind that.

The ability of these people to do their jobs requires support from all sides of the House, and I know the chair would agree with that, that they don't work for the cabinet. They're officers of Parliament. We hire them. Only we can fire them, but this process has not been well done under this government, I think, by anybody's assessment, and I would hope by their own self-reflection.

Support for this motion comes from me directly, not with our interim CEO, the nominee per se, but to talk to the minister about what the consultation process was like. Maybe it was different for the Conservatives. I don't know, but I suspect it was not. Certainly anybody who believes in the idea of consultation, which this government talks about all the time, means that it should mean something. In this case, it meant nothing. It was not consultation at all.

● (1250)

The Chair: Okay. We'll vote on Mr. Reid's amendment to change from two hours to one hour.

Mr. Blake Richards: Let's record the vote.

(Amendment agreed to: yeas 8; nays 1)

The Chair: The motion stays the same, except it's for one hour instead of two.

Mr. Cullen, do you have anything more on the main motion, the amendment?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, my comments reflect on the amendment, which is a reasonable one—to reduce to an hour—and reflect further to the main motion.

The Chair: Do you want to speak to the main motion now?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: No, I'm good.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Richards and then Mr. Reid.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

The first thing I'll do is point out the very brief, dismissive comments made by those on the other side, that this motion simply consisted of, well, there's no point in having the minister come in here and say she won't comment for an hour—or for two hours, I guess, at that time. We saw that happen yesterday.

Whether it's privacy issues or otherwise, that may well be the case, and that may be what she chooses to do. However, that doesn't mean there shouldn't be the opportunity to ask questions of her. It doesn't mean we shouldn't do our jobs as committee members. If the minister refuses to do her job and answer the questions, then Canadians will judge that. That doesn't mean we as a committee would say, "Oh, well, there's no point in doing it because she won't answer anyway." If that were the case, we probably wouldn't have question period every day, because there would be no point then either. I don't think that's true. I think there is a point to it, and if people choose not to answer, that is something people should be judged for. If she chooses not to answer questions, that's her right.

Of course, if we're talking about legitimate privacy issues, fine; that may be the case. However, there are a lot of things in this process that certainly would not qualify for the excuse that we can't give you an answer to that because of privacy. For example, I'll start with....

To be frank, Mr. Chair, I intended this to happen quickly, but I'm a little angry now by the dismissiveness on this motion, on something so important, so it may not be so quick now. It's unfortunate, because it should have been quick.

To follow up on the consultation process that Mr. Cullen mentioned, the type of so-called consultation that happened with his party, the letter that said "Here's our appointment", it didn't ask what we thought about it. It's the same letter we got, I'm sure. I didn't see their letter, but I'm sure it's the same. It was simply, "Here's our appointment." It wasn't, "What did you think? You have until *x* date to let us know your thoughts." It was that this is the appointment they made.

Essentially, that's what the letter consisted of. It was the one name, which has been linked to the media, obviously. I think it was two or three weeks later that another name came. It was very much like the kind of comments we had from the other side today. It was very dismissive. It was sort of, "Well, other candidates have been withdrawn and here's the new candidate." It wasn't, "What do you think about that?" It was, "We're just letting you know."

I don't think that is in the spirit of what this government promised it would do. It was always going to work with other parties. I don't see that happening, so let's answer to that. That doesn't cause any privacy issues; that's something the minister should answer for. It's a decision that her government has made or she has made, so let her answer to it.

In terms of the memorandum that was drafted for the Prime Minister on this issue, which was obtained through access to information, it says right in that memo that one of the things that should occur in this process, and I quote from the memo to the Prime Minister: "Consultation would occur with the Procedure and House Affairs Committee to ensure transparency and to capture its views."

According to the very memo that was given to the Prime Minister of this country, this committee is supposed to be consulted with. How is it supposed to be consulted with to ensure transparency and to capture its views? If we're going to ensure transparency, doesn't that mean the minister should probably answer some questions about the process? That would seem like transparency. Maybe this government views transparency in the same way they view openness to amendments, when we heard from the minister yesterday, "Oh, we're open to amendments, but we won't accept them."

Okay, great. They'll give us the chance to put forward our amendments, but they won't accept them. That's quite open, much like the type of transparency we're seeing here. Capturing the views of the committee, I would assume means the committee would be asked for its opinion. It wouldn't just be, "Oh, here's the second appointment after we withdrew the other one for who knows what reason. We'll bring him in and the committee can ask him some questions for an hour."

● (1255)

How does that capture the views of the committee? It doesn't, does it? Maybe the government should follow its own words and capture the views of the committee. In order to do that, they have to let us do our job properly, which means the minister needs to come here and answer.

Beyond all that, this process has taken about two years. Why, I don't know. Who might be able to answer that question? The minister, perhaps? One would sure hope, but if we don't have the minister come to answer the questions, how will we know, and how can we properly make a decision, and how can we share our views? Does the government want to capture our views, as it claimed it did in this memo to the Prime Minister?

The idea of why bother having the minister and it's a waste of time because she won't answer the questions anyway, as the government member said, is not right. She should come here, and if she chooses not to answer the questions, she should be held accountable for that.

Now, if there are legitimate privacy issues, fine, but there are plenty of things, and I've just outlined a few of them, that can be commented on here. Frankly, this is an officer of Parliament, someone who is supposed to serve this Parliament, as was mentioned already, for 10 years. It's the person who runs our elections in this country. It's a very significant and important role. If the government messes up the process and refuses to answer questions about that process, then how can this committee do its job? Remember, it said we're supposed to capture this committee's views.

Well, we don't have the answers. We don't have the information required to make an assessment and properly give our views. It seems to me as though what we're hearing from the government side is that they don't really care about trying to do that job and that they don't really care what the views are of this committee.

Well, I want to do my job properly. I want to ensure we're doing what we're supposed to do as parliamentarians. If you don't question the decisions, and I don't care what side of the House of Commons you sit on, you should care about doing your job properly and questioning the decisions of the executive. That's our job as members of Parliament. We should all want to do that.

I'm really quite offended by the comments that were made that there's no point having the minister come here because she won't answer the questions anyway; she can't answer questions. Well, she darn well should. I will be appalled if this motion doesn't pass. I thought it was an easy no-brainer. I really did. Why would we not want to do our jobs properly? Why would we not want to ensure that the Prime Minister lives up to his own words? I would sure think, even if I were sitting on the other side, elected under the banner of the Prime Minister, that I would want to make sure he keeps his word. I would think that would be helpful in getting re-elected, if I were on that side. If the Prime Minister chooses not keep his word, I would take that fairly seriously. I certainly do over here, and I know my colleagues do as well.

I sure hope that we will be given the opportunity to do our jobs, that the minister will be expected to do hers, and that the government will be expected to live up to its word. The only way that any of that will happen is for us to pass this motion, and I will point out we very generously made the offer to amend it, to cut the time in half, to help facilitate this. I get the jam that the government has put itself in here. Let's hope that members on the other side choose to take a second thought to this and not be so dismissive of it.

● (1300)

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Chair, on a point of order. I would point out that we are at 1:01 p.m., which would be the normal hour of adjournment for this committee. I look to you, Mr. Chair, as to whether we will be adjourning at 1:01 p.m.

The Chair: The committee chair cannot adjourn the meeting without the consent of the majority of the members, unless the chair decides that a case of disorder or misconduct is so serious as to prevent the committee from continuing its work.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Chair, I would like to follow up on that point of order.

Would it not be incumbent upon you, as chair, to then canvass the committee because we are past the time we would ordinarily adjourn. Would it not be incumbent upon you to canvass the committee for its thoughts on that, and perhaps put it to a vote?

The Chair: You can move to adjourn the meeting, if you want.

Mr. Blake Richards: You as chair would not do that? Someone would make a motion to adjourn?

The Chair: They could.

Mr. Blake Richards: Is that how it would work? I'm trying to understand the procedures.

The Chair: Is there general...?

There doesn't seem to be general consent to adjourn.

As I said earlier, if we're going to travel, we'll have to have a lengthy discussion on that, because we need a budget.

Mr. Blake Richards: If I understand correctly, you're saying that the meeting would continue. You wouldn't canvass the members. It's only if someone made the motion to adjourn. Correct?

● (1305)

The Chair: I just did canvass, and I didn't see a majority in favour, so, yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, am I on the speaking list after Mr. Richards?

The Chair: Yes, you're after Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I think I have concluded my remarks.

I hope we can go to a vote on this. I sure hope that the other side will choose to be far less dismissive of trying to do our jobs properly.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Were you going to move adjournment?

Mr. Blake Richards: No, I want to see a vote on the motion.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right.

I come back to the issue of consultation and secrecy, but actually, before I do that, Mr. Chair, with your permission, I actually meant to raise this as a separate point of order. I hope you'll indulge me.

The issue of adjournment in these kinds of proceedings is, of course, a bit touchy in this committee. There's an interesting history, and as we are engaging in essentially the same process once again, I'll just suggest that what we do with respect to determining how to adjourn and the search for implied consent will have more weight with those who are trying to figure out how to revise *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*—What is it right now? It's Bosc and Gagnon—than will what has happened elsewhere.

So I would like to make the suggestion that the practice of looking around the room and seeing if there is consent, and taking one's time in doing this, as you just did, ought to govern us just as much when the—I don't know how to put this any different way—party of which the chair is a member would like proceedings to wrap up as it does when the party of which the chair is not a member would like things to wrap up. There was an inconsistency last time. I think the process of looking around the room, seeking consent, and taking at least several seconds to do that is appropriate.

I can't remember how much time you took. Maybe it was 10 seconds. That, I think, is a reasonable thing to do, to see about consent. Consent implies "I'm looking to see if there's a consensus", and not "I'm looking to see if there's a majority." That could be dealt with by means of someone moving adjournment. That's where you establish majority and so that's why I asked Mr. Richards if he was going to move adjournment. We then would have found out where the majority sits. There would have been a vote.

In the absence of a vote, presumably the assumption is that any one member can deny a consensus, and everything we do is structured around that basic assumption that you have to move to an actual vote in one form or another in order to establish that the majority is in charge. I'm just saying that so that we can make sure we're consistent, should we be here for some length of time, in the way in which we wrap up these proceedings, when the government decides that they would like the proceedings to be wrapped up.

Let me now turn to the issues of this very expansive definition of secrecy and of privacy in particular. I find that there are certain buzzwords that point to salutary and widely accepted concepts but in a fuzzy way that permits the same word to have different meanings at different times, based on the convenience of the speaker—I don't mean the Speaker of the House; I mean the person then holding the floor—around terms like privacy and dignity. These are terms that, when narrowly constructed, have unanimous support of everybody, the vast majority of Canadians. When very, very broadly constructed, they are used as a way of withholding information, disclosure, access, democracy, and so on. We saw the term "privacy" being used today for that purpose. The implication of Mr. Bittle's words was that—

● (1310)

The Chair: Do you have a point of order?

Mr. Chris Bittle: No, I just want to go on the list.

The Chair: You want to go on the list. Okay.

Mr. Scott Reid: The implication of Mr. Bittle's words was that there's some piece of information that would be embarrassing to somebody—I got the feeling that there was a little subtle implication that it was embarrassing to the initial appointee to the position—that has to be withheld from us.

So out of that, we are deprived of a series of pieces of information that, I think, are legitimately our right. We took an extraordinary length of time to arrive at an appointee, regardless of which of the two appointees we're talking about.

What is the name of the fellow from Saskatchewan again?

Mr. Blake Richards: Michael Boda.

Mr. Scott Reid: Yes, Mr. Boda, and then Mr. Perrault.

It does not speak badly of the merits of either of these two excellent individuals to say that the process itself left Canada's electoral system in limbo for a long time. Now, because everything's been left to a very late hour, we have, once again, the same kind of last-second chaos that has prevailed in the electoral reform issue where the government spun its wheels for 18 months while I got up repeatedly to point out that time was running out, and certain models are going to become inaccessible to us, let alone consulting the people via a referendum.

For 18 months they spun their wheels and then said there was a mad panic until committee produced a result the government didn't like, and then suddenly, it wasn't a priority at all, and the Prime Minister announced that he'd been opposed to proportional representation from the very start, even though he'd had his minister steering the course of the proceedings: "The Prime Minister and I have no favourite model, and we're open to all possibilities." At one point, following a meeting in Victoria, I think, she said she was starting to drift towards one model. That was all contradicted when the Prime Minister came out and said that, since before the election, he'd only ever believed that preferential balloting was an option.

Given the fact that preferential balloting is, compared to proportional representation, a very straightforward system, it doesn't require vast changes. It's not as if he was saying there were multiple versions of preferential to look at. There's really one and one only. There are actually two: optional preferential and mandatory preferential.

The Chair: Could you kind of stay closer to this motion?

Mr. Scott Reid: Oh yes. That which is implicit in my words will become fully evident to all in a very short period of time. My words are, I would say, pregnant with meaning and lots of meaning.

As you know, sometimes I have these thoughts that, like the fetus developing inside a pregnant whale, take months and months, even years, to develop.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blake Richards: Just when you thought it couldn't get any better.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: You're saying we could be here a while.

Mr. Scott Reid: We saw something being slowed down unnecessarily. I don't know whether it's mismanagement that led to that in that particular case or in the case of the current legislation, or in the case of.... Professionally I'm not talking about the decision, I'm talking about the appointment process for the Chief Electoral Officer or for any other appointment processes, which are also held up for an inordinate amount of time. I don't know whether it's a process issue or whether it's an execution issue.

I would like to know because this is a pattern. We have a right to know. Saying it's all private information is just a way of saying, "We're not going to show you what goes on, and you just have to trust us that there's a secret that we are obliged to keep as a government as opposed to a secret that we in practice are obliged to share but we choose not to share for reasons that have to do with the fact that we're a little embarrassed by the fact that we're kind of incompetent at this sort of thing."

I don't ascribe nefarious motives to the government for doing what it did in this matter. I don't know who said this, but I've always thought it was profound, that one ought never to ascribe to machiavellianism that which can be explained by ineptitude. I'm fully prepared to believe that the government was just inept in this matter. I can only speculate as to what the reasons for that ineptitude might be: too many chefs? Alternatively, in the case of this government, the problem is one chef who has to decide on everything, no sous-chefs, and it is difficult to play to the entire dinner for many people. I used to work in a kitchen, by the way.

Without the assistance of people other than the head chef, I think that's the problem here. Everything's got to wait until Justin Trudeau says yes or no personally, and that does not speed up processes very much, not in my experience.

I think that explains what happened during last year's filibusters. It took a month to finally get the issue all the way to the top echelon. In the interim, we'd all come away more enlightened than we currently are. We developed an entirely new set of procedures, allowing us to have a back-and-forth conversation in the middle of the filibuster, the key principle of which was named after my esteemed colleague Mr. Simms. While that speaks well to the people on this committee and their ability to work together, it doesn't speak well to the nature of highly centralized decision-making, which I think may be the problem here. If so, we could learn that without revealing any secrets about Ms. Sahota, Mr. Parent, or any other person other than the secret of what's going on behind that curtain in the middle of the emerald city, where I think one wizard has too many levers to twiddle with and just can't keep up with all the decisions that these highly centralized decision-making structures have caused. That's my theory.

I don't know that is the problem, but it's a problem which occurs to me, and if I'm wrong, I could be disabused of my mistaken notion by having the minister come here for an hour and explain what was going on. We might very well leave impressed.

I do think I'm right in saying that the minister, on the whole, is a very intelligent person who is able to express herself eloquently, when she is given liberty to do so, to defend her government's practices and to show there is genuine goodwill to improve the practices in the future. I think that on the whole, she has been able to juggle a very difficult portfolio and certain personal challenges, of which we're all aware, with a capacity that I think very few other people could manage, so I think she could handle an hour-long meeting. I really do. I think she could do it with ease. We'd all come away more enlightened than we currently are.

● (1315)

That is why I say this whole secrecy argument doesn't really hold up very well. It's too broad. It's too inclusive. It is too much the use of a term that has a fungible meaning—an expandable, contractible meaning. It's the use of what is known as a motte and bailey argument. Secrecy can mean something very specific, like in the Official Secrets Act, or it can mean something very broad, some information that would make somebody feel uncomfortable, and good taste forbids us from going in that direction.

I will mention, now that I've raised the Official Secrets Act, a very strong counter-argument to what Mr. Bittle is putting forward. Let's say, for the sake of argument, it is the case there is something that actually would qualify as an official secret, a cabinet confidence that really cannot be shared with the members of this committee and the public. There is a way around this. We know this because the government has actually actively offered exactly this way of handling things.

Do you remember when our Conservative leader, Honourable Andrew Scheer, was raising the issue of Daniel Jean, the national security adviser, and his commentary relating to the actions of the Indian government and the conspiracy theory that Mr. Jean put forward? The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness stood up in the House of Commons and said, well, they were happy.

● (1320)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Chair, I rise on a point of order. I apologize to my friend Mr. Reid. I always enjoy his chatter.

Mr. Scott Reid: I know you meant that in the very best way.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I meant it totally, exactly, in the nicest way possible

By sequence of timing—and I never want to impinge on a member's right to speak to an issue—liaison meets this afternoon, I believe, and if things proceed as they are right now, at least, we will be making a decision as a committee not to be able to petition for travel next week.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I don't know what the government's feeling is on this, and I'm not going to speak to anyone's intention as to why they're speaking to what or for how long, but my suggestion would be that the committee—and I don't know how this would work procedurally—suspend the conversation on this motion, which is what we're dealing with right now, Mr. Richards' motion, to be able to have the conversation as to whether the committee is still interested in proposing the travel, as we discussed last night, and at least confirming that piece of it. Otherwise, we will have made the decision not to do it. I don't know anyone's intentions around the table, but the intention of the committee, as of last night, was that we were, in fact, travelling. We were going to petition the liaison committee this afternoon, through you, Chair, on our behalf. I don't know what the Liberals' feelings on the committee are to at least deal with the travel component. If we don't make that decision within the next 40 minutes or so, the ship will have sailed.

Mr. Chris Bittle: On the point of order, I agree with Mr. Cullen that decisions have to be made. In attempting to provide the clerk with flexibility, I think we made his job more difficult, and some decisions have to be made essentially to set out our calendar for the next few weeks. Understanding and appreciating the rights of Mr. Reid and Mr. Richards, if these decisions aren't made, then travel won't happen, just because of the logistics of it.

Mr. Blake Richards: On that, it's my motion, obviously, but I will say this. I'm comfortable with interrupting that, if it's procedurally possible, in order to deal with the travel portion. If we deal with that and then come back to the motion, I would be happy to entertain that as well.

The Chair: Is there unanimous consent to suspend debate on Mr. Richards' motion while we talk about travel?

Mr. Blake Richards: Before I would consent to that, what that would then mean, though, is that as soon as that decision is made about travel, we would be returning to this motion. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Is it about travel or is it about the rest of this study?

Mr. Blake Richards: My understanding is it's just travel.

● (1325)

Mr. Chris Bittle: We can't deal with one issue in absence of the other, so let's be realistic about this.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm comfortable with discussing the travel portion. Otherwise I would say we must continue with the motion.

Mr. Scott Reid: That's really up to Mr. Cullen to say, isn't it, what his motion consists of?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: My intention was the timing piece of it. If we lose two o'clock, then we potentially lose the travel component. On the larger motion, we've had some conversations about it, but more informally. Have we had a full committee conversation about it? I don't think so. It's just been informal. The government presented a motion and we've had chats about it, but the committee itself....

My original intent was exclusively to talk about travel, but it sounds like that might be a line in the sand for both Liberals and Conservatives. Liberals want to be able to talk about the whole motion, is my guess, and Conservatives only want to talk about the travel motion. That's where we might be.

The Chair: I think that was a good description.

The Chair: Blake.

Mr. Blake Richards: I would just add to that. I'm completely comfortable with the idea of our discussing the travel. The way Mr. Cullen's explained it, we've already had discussions about that. It's an easy thing for us to resolve and finalize, whereas the other portions of what the government presented are maybe not so easy to finalize. To me it would seem unfortunate. It sounds to me that if they're not willing to carve out the travel, maybe they just don't want to travel. I can understand why they wouldn't want to do that. That's unfortunate, because it would be easy for us to all come to a....

It seems to be a kind of pattern that's developing here. It's the same thing as with this motion. It seemed like it would have been an easy situation to deal with something that's doing our jobs and making sure we're doing them properly. It would seem like it would be easy for us at this point to just deal with the travel quickly, answer any questions the clerk has, and allow that to move forward. If the government doesn't want to travel and hear from Canadians, I guess we're stuck with the motion.

The Chair: Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Well, it's unfortunate. I was watching Facebook Live last night. Mr. Richards was talking about private conversations that we had. During those private conversations we agreed last night to discuss the travel portion so we could discuss the remainder today. Is he a person of his word? I'm finding more and more of these instances, as we're going forward in this committee, and it's truly unfortunate. We pushed forward on that presumption last night. I hope he follows through on that.

We legitimately debated and focused on the travel issue last night in order to debate the remainder of it the next day. He told me it probably wasn't going to.... I suggested it might be a fight, and he said, "Well, it may not be a fight", which were his words. Unfortunately, I was right.

This is something that has to be discussed. We're up against the tail end. We want to get this through. I know we want to bring this forward to Canadians. The Conservatives suggest they want to bring this forward to Canadians. I know Mr. Cullen has been straight from the start saying that he wants to bring this across the country. Let's get this done, but let's talk about this in the context of an entire study. It doesn't make sense to talk about a week's worth of study in the context of two to three weeks of study. Let's be realistic about this and let's follow through on the promises that we make to each other.

Mr. Blake Richards: If I can respond to that, I think what we heard just now was quite disingenuous. What we're talking about in the motion the government put forward, after looking at it and considering what is in there, essentially it simply allows the week of travel, and there would be no other study based on the motion the government's put forward. If they're going to try to claim that somehow it needs to be considered in the context of everything else, what that's saying is they just don't want to travel. All they're talking about in terms of a study would be the week of travel.

I came here today with the intention that my motion would be dealt with quickly. The government doesn't want to allow that to happen because they want to deny it, and that's unfortunate. Now we're stuck in a position where we have to fight for that. I will not give up that fight because it's an important one. I understand the position the government's in. They want to get their bill rammed through. I want to make sure we have proper and full debate. If this government is going to come forward to say, "Look, we're going to try to do our job, allow this motion to pass", we can move to that stuff, but that doesn't appear to be the case. We'll be debating that motion until that does appear to be the case.

In the meantime, I thought it was very reasonable of Mr. Cullen to suggest to deal with this easy situation, which we'd already agreed to, the travel. If the government doesn't want to travel, then they should just say so instead of trying to blame others. If they want to go forward with the rest of the stuff, that means putting aside my motion, and I'm sorry, but I can't agree to that. I'm insulted and offended by what they've done today.

● (1330)

The Chair: Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Richards still hasn't addressed the questions I brought forward based on our discussion last night. He can pretend to feign all the outrage that exists in this room, and I appreciate his attempting to do so.

We're happy to travel. We've been asking members of the opposition for a plan over the—

Mr. Blake Richards: Get on with it.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Richards, I have the floor. I didn't interrupt you, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Get on with it.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Get on with it. We've been listening to you speak for an hour and a half, and that was your right, and I have the floor—

Mr. Blake Richards: We're all willing to work on it, and you're not.

The Chair: Mr. Bittle has the floor.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We're happy to travel. We've been asking members of the opposition for a detailed plan for the last two weeks. The Conservatives have provided nothing. The NDP are the only ones that have come forward with any helpful suggestions. I appreciate the attempt—this is politics—to blame the government. However, in between a filibuster, this continued debate, saying something last night, doing something completely different, and then saying something even different from that on Facebook Live last night—which was bizarre in and of itself, but it's your right as a member of Parliament to do so—we're here.

We want to get this bill through. I know that the Conservatives do not want to see this bill passed. We want to see this bill passed. There's where it sits at the end of the day. We'd like to have a schedule that includes travel that takes us from coast to coast. We put forward a plan for that last night. I think the committee was in agreement that we do that. The discussion last night when you and I spoke, Mr. Richards, was that we would discuss the remainder of the motion today. It doesn't seem that you want to do that today. I don't know which Mr. Richards to trust: the one when the cameras are on or the one when the cameras are off.

We'd like to discuss this based on our conversations yesterday.

I saw that Mr. Cullen had his hand up, so I'd like to hear what he has to say on this.

The Chair: Mr. Cullen, did you want to add something?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I think what I described before still sounds accurate, maybe with more ad hominem attacks there, but the basic principles are the same. My ultimate goal is to allow us to be able to petition.... It's the liaison, right? No?

The Clerk: It's the subcommittee on budgets, the liaison subcommittee.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Right. My ultimate goal is to allow us to petition them with what we seemed to have agreed to last night. It sounds like, from the Liberal side, agreeing to that being put forward is conditional on having the conversation of the rest of the committee's study. It sounds like, from the Conservative side of things, that's not acceptable. My original motion was just to talk about the travel component. That is what I said.

I'm open to either, but if it's intractable, we need unanimous consent—which is what I suspect, Mr. Chair—to be able to accomplish that. I suggest that we maybe go back to the conversation around Mr. Richards' motion, and see if we can't figure out something prior to two o'clock with some off-line conversations.

The Chair: Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm not returning to Mr. Richards' motion just at the moment. I want to deal with the point of order because there's some information that I don't have. Perhaps I should just know these things. The deadline is 2 p.m. The committee meets—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: [*Inaudible—Editor*] for question period, and I think the subcommittee meets at 3:30 this afternoon typically—

The Clerk: It's 5:30.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I don't know what your deadline is. I'd have to refer to our clerk or our chair as to when we need this committee to pass the motion on travel. I assume it's well before five o'clock.

The Clerk: The earlier the better, but up until 5:30.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: There is a potential even post-QP if this is the conversation that we're still having to resolve something. In terms of the travel component, which you have to bring to the subcommittee, you have the basic tenets of it. You just have to have the committee members nod around the table to say yes, but it's now become hooked to this other thing, Mr. Chair. It seems like we have to risk sacrificing something that we've all agreed to.

The Chair: Yes.

I think that on the point of order there is, as Mr. Cullen has described, no consensus, so we'll go back to the—

Mr. Scott Reid: I just want to clarify that the deadline we actually have is not 2 p.m. It's a little later than that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's a little later than that.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, all right. I'm not the person who would negotiate for my side. I just wanted to make sure of that.

Could I ask just one more thing? It relates to the same point. The subcommittee meets once per week. Is that right? I'm not actually advocating this. Please don't misunderstand. I'm merely throwing it out as a possibility. We have a very tight deadline that involves travel next week and the week after that, on the Tuesday, I believe.

I have item 6 of the Liberals' scheduling motion, which came out last night. I think this is the one that Mr. Bittle was referring to. Item 6 refers to Tuesday of the week following.

In principle, anyway, if that were to slide back a further week, we could still have the travel. It would just be the week of June 10 to 13. I'm not advocating anything. I'm just pointing out that you want to have as many doors as possible, and then others have to decide on this.

I hope I won't be misunderstood as suggesting anything that I'm not. Now I know that it's once a week, and that basically Tuesdays are the days that you have to get it done.

The Chair: Okay, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, I'll go back to the motion.

● (1335)

The Chair: Go back to Mr. Richards' motion.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, but we now know we have a couple of different things we didn't know before.

Who is on the speaking list besides me?

The Chair: Mr. Bittle and Mr. Nater.

Mr. Scott Reid: I think Mr. Richards is also on there.

The Chair: Then, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Scott Reid: All right.

I think I've dealt with most of what I had to say on the subject of privacy. I had just one further comment on the subject of the issue of privacy, a summation, as it were, of what I was saying earlier. I would summarize it this way. I don't want to be unfair to Mr. Bittle, but I do feel that what he was doing was a bit of a version of what's known as a motte and bailey argument, in which you use a term where you can retract it to its narrow meaning and say, don't you agree with the right to privacy? Don't people have a right to their privacy? For goodness sake, you can't have everybody spying into everybody else's life. Aren't you outraged by Cambridge Analytica, and aren't you appalled by Mr. Zuckerberg's willingness to sell your information to people who then make assumptions about your activities and desires and try to manipulate them through their ads?

I assume that is why I used to get ads on Facebook—or maybe it was Google—where they thought I wanted orthopaedic aids. I think the reason was that they identified I was getting a lot of correspondence dealing with pensions. It was from people who were worried about their Canada pension plan cheque not having come through. Anyway, they said, "Ha, there's this key word. He must need orthopaedic aids." I would have been happier if that hadn't happened. I could say that's an invasion of my privacy. We all agree with that kind of privacy.

When you spread it so broadly that everything that might make, say, the government uncomfortable is counted as privacy, you've entered the bailey region. The motte is the little part in the middle of the castle. The bailey is the larger part. You then expand out to something else that's broader, and you take in claims as part of that word that are not something the average person thinks is reasonable. So yes, it could be embarrassing to the government. It could be that people would say that this is not a reasonable way of doing things, and the government would be a little embarrassed by the fact that people now know this, but that doesn't change the fact that the people have the right to know it.

Preserving the government from embarrassment is not something that is regarded as a legitimate thing in this country. We have very careful rules about this. This is a motte and bailey argument. You can actually look up motte and bailey arguments on the Internet and learn more about them in greater detail. I invite you to do that.

I want to now turn to the issue of consultation with the other parties. The term "consultation" seems to be interpreted more and more narrowly by the current government. Every opposition complains about every government's lack of consultation and the pro forma nature of its consultation. I've been in opposition twice now, once back from 2000 through 2005 and then since the 2015 election, with a 10-year period where my party was in government. I've had a chance to see this from both sides, and from the opposition side twice.

Under the Chrétien government we complained, because Mr. Chrétien would—as it was described to me—call up Stockwell Day and then John Reynolds, who was the leader of the opposition. After that, it was Stephen Harper. He did this pro forma thing where he'd call up and say, "We've chosen so-and-so for this job. We're just letting you know." That was consultation. At least we got a phone call.

Now, if what Nathan Cullen described is correct, we get the equivalent of an automated voice that says, "Your call is important to us." That's not consultation. That's giving prior cognizance, but that's all it is. Consultation actually involves people having the ability to say something back, like, "We don't think that's the best candidate. Have you considered so-and-so?" or something of that nature.

● (1540)

The standards of Mr. Chrétien's government were not high. I actually can't remember what the standards of the government I was a part of were—I'm going to guess the Liberals say they were not high—and the standards of the current Trudeau government, by that low measure, are too low: they are lower yet.

This is not an acceptable way of carrying on a consultation. We should have the right to ask the minister what the process was, what the protocol is.

Here's what we're really getting at: is there an internal protocol in the Liberal government on what constitutes a consultation? This is not something dictated by law. It's dictated by convention, which is to say it's dictated by that which is generally found to be acceptable by the public at large and particularly by the politically knowledgeable public. By that standard I believe this government is failing, but as long as the failure is kept in obscurity, as long as we don't know what the rule is, if they have a rule—maybe it's a moving target, or they use a different standard at different times, depending on which minister is making.... Who knows?

Knowing whether there is an internal protocol as to what constitutes consultation, when it was adopted, how it varies from that which existed under the previous government would be helpful. That should be public information.

There is in the Library of Parliament a book that lists political conventions and attempts to systematize them. It was developed under the Pearson government in 1967. It has not, shamefully, been updated since that time, but it contains protocols for any number of different things.

Here, for example, is the way, if you are resigning from cabinet, that you ought to address the issue on which you are resigning without revealing a cabinet confidence. There is a draft letter laid out. There is a draft response from the Prime Minister laid out so this can be followed, allowing for a person who is resigning on principle to indicate what the principle was without violating cabinet confidences, to prevent their resigning under a cloud or breaking an official secret.

Similarly, there is some kind of protocol at work here, and we ought to know what it is. It ought to be public. The minister could provide us information on it that would not involve saying it's all a secret—would not legitimately involve saying that. The minister could try to say it did, but were she to say that, she would not be telling the truth.

We all avoid in this place. We may not always say the whole truth, but that which we say is the truth, and that, of course, includes the minister, who has as far as I can tell always been truthful with me, and indeed as far as I can see with everybody else—as is her duty, but I think it comes naturally to her.

If you don't mind, Mr. Chair, I want in connection with this to deal with Mr. Bittle's comments earlier regarding my colleague, Mr. Richards. I must say, having known Blake a long time—Blake worked under me when I was the critic or shadow minister, as we now say, and I have subsequently worked under his leadership—that I have never once seen him deviate from the absolute truth on anything or suggest that it's acceptable ever. He is a man of the highest honour, as is appropriate.

Some people will say you should devalue remarks made by a colleague in defence of a colleague of the same partisan stripe. You can do that if you wish, but I have the highest regard for Blake Richards, and I think that Mr. Bittle's comments were not ideal. Upon consideration he may come to that conclusion himself—although I hold Mr. Bittle in high regard.

I made some jokes earlier about Scott Brison not really liking him. That, of course, was not.... I was dissembling a bit when I said I suspect that Scott Brison likes him just as much as he likes the rest of his own caucus. I can go and ask Scott at some point and confirm this. He may wonder why I'm asking such a strange question, but—

● (1345)

Mr. John Nater: On a point of order, just to confirm, has Mr. Brison ever been a member of your caucus?

Mr. Scott Reid: Well, that's actually—

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not sure he liked you when he was.

Mr. Scott Reid: Actually, that's a complicated question, because Mr. Brison left the PC caucus when the merger was anticipated. It hadn't yet happened.

Mr. Simms knows that story. That's right.

We have thus never actually served in the same caucus.

Mr. Blake Richards: Almost.

Mr. Scott Reid: We came close. He has let me know that the fact I was a member of the caucus he'd be joining had nothing to do with his decision, so this is the basis on which I say that he likes me so much.

Mr. Chair, I know that you are worried that I might, in the future, stray a tiny bit from the strict and punctilious observance I've had of absolute relevancy in every detail of what I've said so far. Keeping that thought in mind, I have decided that it might now be a good opportunity to bring my conclusions on this matter to a close, although I do have some further thoughts, which I can express after I get put back on the speaker's list further down on this particular motion.

Thank you.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: I move that the debate be now adjourned.

Some hon members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blake Richards: Point of order.

The Chair: Sorry, there's no debate on this. We have to go to the vote on this.

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, I just wanted to point out that this is open and accountable government right here, Mr. Chair. This is open and accountable government.

An hon. member: I would like a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 3)

The Chair: With the discussion on the travel, the clerk thinks it is better to do this in camera. Is it okay if we go in camera to discuss—

Mr. Blake Richards: No.

Mr. Scott Reid: Sorry, to discuss—

The Chair: The travel—

Mr. Scott Reid: Is that Mr. Cullen's travel bit?

The Chair: Yes. It's the travel for next week.

Okay. We have to continue in public, unless someone moves a motion that we go in camera.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Shall we suspend until Mr. Cullen returns?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): We'll have to suspend for question period anyway.

Mr. Scott Reid: He's going to be at QP.

Mr. Blake Richards: If we want to suspend until after question period—

The Chair: Okay.

● (1350)

Mr. Chris Bittle: We should suspend and reconvene after QP.

The Chair: Suspend and reconvene after QP? That's it for that.

Mr. Scott Reid: What does after QP mean? At 3:30? Give me a time.

The Chair: Yes, we will reconvene at 3:30.

● (Pause) ●

● (1535)

The Chair: Welcome back to meeting 107 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Before we get into the business at hand, I just want to mention that the researcher thinks he can have the report that we did this morning, which was in confidence, so I won't say anything about it, back by tomorrow afternoon. If that's the case, I'll set aside 10 minutes. There wasn't any discussion on it, and if there are no changes, I'll set aside 10 minutes on Thursday just to approve that.

We're doing committee business, and we're talking about the potential of travel.

The floor is open.

Ruby.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I was hoping that we would get started with the travel so that we can assist the clerk in the plans that need to be made. Mr. Cullen is very interested in travelling, and obviously, we see the benefit in the testimony that we would receive there. I wasn't here yesterday, but I believe that something was negotiated to go from the east coast to the west coast, hitting the cities of Halifax, Montreal....

Help me out, people.

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Toronto, Vancouver....

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Maybe Winnipeg, and then Vancouver, and something else.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Winnipeg and Vancouver.

We've had some discussions in which we were thinking we could hit some rural areas or city areas, but I was wondering if there were specific questions that maybe the clerk could address to the chair, and then we could give our feedback on how we would like to see it happening.

I think, from what Mr. Cullen said before, he wants to hear from the public and also have some expert witness testimony, so we're hoping that we would have expert witnesses up front, and if there was an opportunity to provide it in a given city, we would hear from the public immediately following the expert witnesses. If anyone wanted to come forward, we'd hear from them in a way that would be similar somehow to the structure that we had for the electoral reform committee.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Chair, I just want to clarify that the government now is interested in discussing the travel separately, because that was something they didn't want to do before, and I think it was a good idea, and I hope that they've changed their minds.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's contingent upon a lot of other factors, but I thought we would just get the ball rolling with discussing it.

Of course, I'll bring forward everything else that we want to see. If we are going to go on the road, we have to have some reassurance that we're going to get through this bill clause by clause, so I'd like to move with that proposal for that.

Mr. Blake Richards: So the government doesn't intend to move the motion that was handed out last night?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We do intend to move it. I do intend to move it —

Mr. Blake Richards: Your intention is to split the travel out first and then move the motion.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

The Chair: We have with us, fortunately, the logistics person, Jill McKenny.

Thank you for joining us.

She's done a little research into the different routes and that kind of stuff. She could update us on some of the options. Some of the rooms that we thought of aren't available at certain times of the week, etc. If you could outline what you've found out, that would probably be helpful for the committee.

The Clerk: Maybe just before we do that, I'll address the committee quickly about some of the information. We'd be looking for some more specific information from the committee about destinations that the committee wishes to go to. I know we have some idea, and Jill and her team have done a fair amount of work already putting together a couple draft budgets based on last evening's discussion, and I think those budgets include Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, somewhere in the Prairies, and Vancouver. It would be helpful to us if the place across the Prairies—those are three provinces—could be narrowed down a little.

The discussion yesterday was about visiting a rural area on that stop as well, and maybe holding meetings in a rural area. We've done a little bit of research, but we haven't had a chance to do any sort of exhaustive research about which rural communities would be able to accommodate the type of hearing that we're anticipating. If members have some guidance for us, that would be helpful.

● (1540)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: If it facilitates the planning a lot quicker to have it in an urban centre because of the facilities that would be available to you, we can have witnesses who are from nearby rural areas come to that meeting and testify. If we are doing an open mike there, we can have it open to people from the rural area, or at the very least....

The Chair: Let's wait until we've heard the options.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

The Chair: Then you can put in all of this feedback.

Mr. Blake Richards: If I could, because it's on the very point that was just raised, we did discuss that yesterday, if you recall, and the point that was made at that time—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I wasn't here, so let me know.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay, so maybe that's why.

The issue with that would be that if you invite people from the rural areas, especially in a town hall type of setting, those voices would be swamped by the urban voices. The whole idea of having a rural location was to give that opportunity—at least in one location, if not more, but I think it was only going to be one—for those voices to be the primary voices. That was the idea.

I know the clerk is looking for some way to narrow down that centre. I understand that you had looked into this a bit and had looked at the idea of Olds, Alberta. I would understand why you would choose Olds, Alberta, because Olds College is located there. It has a very central location. It has the college, and the good facilities for it. It's less than an hour from Calgary airport. It makes sense.

I'm going to throw this in here. It's a selfish matter for me. It's my hometown, where I was born and raised. It's not my constituency. I would not be able to be on the last portion of the week, because I have a private member's motion that's being debated, and I would have to be here for that, obviously.

If we were going there, I would ask for the indulgence of the clerks, my colleagues. It would sure be nice to be there for that, in my hometown where I was born and raised.

If that's the decision you would make to go, I think it is a good choice, not just because it's my hometown but because it does makes sense for all of the reasons of what we're trying to find in this hearing. I would ask that maybe we can facilitate it. Maybe we can flip it and have the travel go west to east, rather than east to west, which would allow....

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What day would you have to be back?

Mr. Blake Richards: I think as long as I'm here on Thursday, it would be okay.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: As long as it's done by Wednesday, you're good.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes.

The Chair: Let's hear the logistics. They've already looked into some of this.

The Clerk: Jill has put together a few different scenarios. Maybe at this point I'll let her explain what the options are.

Ms. Jill McKenny (Coordinator, Logistics Services, House of Commons): In terms of the availability of the meeting space at Olds College, they would be available uniquely at the beginning of the week, so Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday.

Mr. Blake Richards: That would be all right. I should have just kept my mouth shut.

Ms. Jill McKenny: There also seemed to be an interest in possibly the Vancouver area, holding the public hearings in Tsawwassen. That is also only available at the beginning of the week.

The west to east flow works well for those two cities.

In terms of the logistics of getting you there, it's a bit more difficult, because you do lose time, particularly if you're going from Olds to Toronto, meaning that you'll either have to cut your time short in Olds, or start later in Toronto, if you're doing commercial flights. There is a workaround. If you do a chartered flight, that solves those logistical issues. It does come with a price tag.

Mr. Blake Richards: I don't mean to question your work. I know you do excellent work; I have worked with you as chair of this committee before. But I know there are a lot of direct flights from Calgary to Toronto.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Thank you.

There are indeed. It's the timing.

My understanding is that the committee would like to hold public hearings in the afternoon and evening, and because of that, then the Olds portion in the evening would be cut short to accommodate leaving for the 7:19 p.m. flight.

● (1545)

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, unless we do a red-eye flight.

Ms. Jill McKenny: The red-eye would be the only other option, leaving just shortly after midnight, 12:20 a.m., arriving at 6 a.m.

Mr. Blake Richards: I could point out, if it's helpful, that in a more rural community sometimes it is a little easier for people to do it during the day than in the evening. In rural communities sometimes the schedules are a little different, if it's farmers or someone like that. Not that their evenings are necessarily any better than their—

Ms. Jill McKenny: If we approach that in one city, then consistency is key, in order for the logistics to make sense.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: One thing I had suggested up front, though, was for the meetings to be together. If we had the expert panel, the open session would be immediately after, without a break, so we have it compact. If it's afternoon or evening, we can travel during the day, and then head into the session and have it all together within the three-hour period, with maybe two hours of expert testimony and one hour of open mike, depending how many witnesses we have in any given city.

Mr. Blake Richards: The challenge being outlined here, though, is that because of the flight, the time changes, and things such as that, if we were to do it, we'd have to fly either in the evening or in the morning.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: In the morning.

Mr. Blake Richards: If we use the red-eye flight, we can leave at midnight and get in at 6 a.m. If we don't do that—and it isn't the best thing to do, although I've done it a number of times because it had to be done—then we leave on the earliest flight, at 6 a.m. or 7:00 a.m., or whatever it is, and we lose half a day because of the time change and everything. That's what you're getting at, isn't it?

Ms. Jill McKenny: If your idea is to have your public hearings in the afternoon and evening, you're travelling in the morning and doing your public hearings in the afternoon and evening. However, in order to get from Olds to Toronto, there's that gap and the time change. You'll need to leave a little earlier and you'll eat into some of that time at Olds College. That is, unless you're doing a charter, in which case you have a lot more flexibility.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: As well, you'll have a lot more free time at the spot.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Indeed.

Mr. Blake Richards: If we could leave early in the morning, and if we're saying we're going to do just afternoons and evenings in Toronto, would there be a flight to facilitate that? There has to be a 6 a.m. or 7 a.m. flight, or something such as that.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Right. Your idea would be to start a little earlier in Olds, finish earlier, and then head to Toronto on an afternoon flight.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's possible too, but based on what I thought I heard Ruby say, we'd have afternoon and evening sessions in Toronto. That would allow us the time in Olds. We could stay overnight near the Calgary airport and then fly out on the first, or one of the first, available flights the next morning, which would put us in Toronto by—

Ms. Jill McKenny: It would be 1:15 p.m. You'll get out of the airport at around two o'clock and you'll be downtown around three o'clock. It becomes a little later start in Toronto.

Mr. Blake Richards: [*Inaudible—Editor*] closer to the airport.

Ms. Jill McKenny: There's that, absolutely.

Mr. Blake Richards: Then we can have an extra hour and make it two o'clock.

The Chair: Before we go any further, Mr. Garrison has just joined us and he has no idea what we're talking about.

I'll just explain that we're looking at potential travel for the committee next week to the five regions of Canada: to four major cities in four of those regions, and to a rural community in the fifth region. We're just discussing the logistics.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you, sir.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: |*Inaudible—Editor*|

The Chair: Yes, but we are going to finish hearing from the logistics coordinator.

Carry on.

Ms. Jill McKenny: You do have other options. You can travel from east to west with the travel in the morning and public hearings in the afternoon. That allows a little more flexibility for the travel and for the public hearings to occur in the afternoon. However, it would then not be possible to go to Olds College and to the indigenous community as well.

The Chair: It's Tsawwassen.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Tsawwassen.

The Clerk: If the committee has other suggestions—

Mr. Scott Simms: Are you done?

Ms. Jill McKenny: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We are just talking about one hearing in each location. Whichever location we choose, there's a divide of rural and urban that we're probably going to do throughout the week, but in each location, we're just having the one hearing and it's going to be together. We'll have the two hours of witnesses and then open mike right away so that it's efficient on time. That's how I envision it.

● (1550)

Mr. Blake Richards: It was very much like what we did with the electoral reform committee, where in each province we had the one stop or whatever. Yes, exactly, that was my understanding.

I'd go back to the original idea of going west to east.

Mr. Scott Simms: I've been on the list for 10 minutes now. No offence, guys, but—

Mr. Blake Richards: Scott, the floor is yours.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Scott Simms: I don't even know what I wanted to ask you about.

For the Olds situation and the community out west, absolutely it seems to me that Olds is the place to go for our rural setting. I wholeheartedly agree with you. We should go to a setting and not ask people to come in from the outside. Even I suggested that yesterday and realized the folly of my ways by the end of the conversation.

When it comes to the charter flight, just so that I have this straight, would the charter be only for the west? You would do it the whole way through.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Indeed.

Mr. Scott Simms: Is the price tag considerably higher then?

Ms. Jill McKenny: Yes, $100,000 higher.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Oh my, that's considerable.

Mr. Scott Simms: If you look at the western area, we go around the western area and then fly commercial to the east. Even that would not reduce it either. I'm thinking you'd get a smaller charter, if that were the case, or am I making it more complicated?

Ms. Jill McKenny: The distance is the issue, and that's why we need a jet to travel that long distance in that amount of time.

Mr. Scott Simms: I see.

Then we go toward the east. It would make things more efficient if we'd go to Toronto, Montreal, then Halifax, assuming that commercial activity will be there, such that we can easily get around.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Essentially, with a charter flight you have so much flexibility that the committee can do whatever it pleases.

Mr. Scott Simms: Can we do a different charter in the east as opposed to the west? Would that make things cheaper? You would be getting a prop plane now, I would assume.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Your suggestion would be to travel between the east and the west commercially.

Mr. Scott Simms: Yes.

Ms. Jill McKenny: There would still be the issue for the time. If I'm hearing correctly and the intention is to have shorter public hearings, just a few hours, it may be something we can work around. For example—

Mr. Blake Richards: I would like to inject one little thing into this because it fits with what you're saying. What I was hearing before was literally that Alberta to Toronto was the issue. Are there any other issues you wouldn't have without the charter?

Ms. Jill McKenny: I believe that's the only one. However, if the public hearings are only going to be a few hours, that may still work. We may be able to get to Olds on time, able to leave. The afternoon portion would be doable. The evening portion would be difficult in Olds.

Mr. Blake Richards: We could either adjust that, or the other option would be to adjust in Toronto and have the meetings, rather than closer to downtown, closer to the airport, so we would save an hour of driving, which would give us some time in the afternoon for a meeting and still an evening in Toronto as well. We could adjust either one of those, whatever is easiest for you.

Mr. Scott Simms: In addition to that, just a final note on the eastern side of things, Toronto-Montreal, I'd leave it to my colleagues to come up with suggestions there. Halifax, I'm probably speaking for my colleague.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What about St. John's?

Mr. Scott Simms: She wants to go to St. John's, Newfoundland. I would too, but I think that yesterday the consensus was Halifax. If it is, maybe you want to consider a university campus there. We did talk about going to a campus for youth. I know that both St. Mary's and Dalhousie would probably be good places for that.

Are you about to correct me on something?

The Clerk: No, not correct you. It's just to state that the Olds College stop would be on a college campus, so that would check one of the boxes.

Mr. Scott Simms: I see.

Yes, because I was just thinking that the problem in going to a campus in Halifax is that, for some reason—I know we're public but I always poke fun at them—the fact is that Halifax has a wonderful airport, but why they put it in Cape Breton, I don't know. Anyway, no offence there, but we could probably stay closer. That would be a bit of—

Mr. Blake Richards: An interesting thing in Olds, with the college—you mentioned the campus there—is that probably more so than most colleges it draws from pretty much all over western Canada. These kids would be further from home maybe than they would be in a lot of cases. That probably is a good thing. If there are challenges, they would be more likely to have them there.

Mr. Scott Simms: Boy, this Olds community is covering off everything, isn't it? I'm going to move there by the time this is done.

Mr. Blake Richards: It's a pretty great place.

● (1555)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: How far is Olds from the airport?

Mr. Blake Richards: It's about 45 minutes.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: There's an airport in Olds, but it's only for props.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, you don't want to fly into there—for the size of what we would have to fly in, no.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: We could fly in a smaller prop plane. I wonder if that would be a lot cheaper, because if you want to go in a jet, which seems—

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not sure anything besides...it would be a very small aircraft.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: It's 3,600 feet. We can land there.

Mr. Blake Richards: Honestly, it would be quicker to drive than fly, anyway.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay, so what cities, what areas, locations have we confirmed, Alberta?

The Chair: One point, Scott, I think that the choice of Halifax was because of commercial flights. If we were to do the charter, I don't think it really matters where we'd go in the east.

Go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I was just going to ask whether we could lock down the locations. We have Olds school. We have Tsawwassen, which is where we'd start. Then we'd go to Olds school and Toronto.

Is it Olds school?

Mr. Blake Richards: It's the college in Olds.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Oh, sorry about my ignorance. I think it will be lovely to go, and I'll never forget it after that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): I did go to the old school, but it wasn't that one.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You are old school.

It's Toronto after that and then Montreal. It's too bad Nathan Cullen isn't here because this really was his baby, and this is what he wanted to do. He wants to go on the road. We're making these decisions on his behalf, I guess.

Mr. Randall Garrison: They found a member with a similar haircut.

The Chair: We kind of agreed with all of these cities last night, Ruby.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No. I think we've changed it a little bit.

Mr. Blake Richards: We've put more detail to it. I know for a fact that Nathan.... I don't want to speak for him, but I did talk to him about whether he would be okay with flipping the west to the east, and he said that was fine by him. He wasn't concerned. That's really the only change over what was discussed, and he did indicate to me that he was fine with that, if that helps.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. We have Montreal. Then we're headed into Atlantic Canada, and we'll land in Halifax. Is that what was discussed yesterday?

Mr. Scott Simms: That was what we came to yesterday, Halifax.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Halifax. Is that it?

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Our plan would be to do commercial flights for Halifax.

We should probably have a deadline for witnesses on the road whom we'd like to invite. I'm sure there's some guidance that could be provided by the clerk, but we should all be responsible for figuring out who we'd like to hear from on the road.

Thank you, Mr. Cullen, for joining us. We were just sorting out the travel plans that you so anxiously wanted to be in on.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Randall wants to travel. I don't know why he's leaving the table.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I do 18 hours per week.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Sorry, my apologies.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No problem. We believe you and Blake had a conversation about the possibility of flipping the travel. That's what we're talking about right now.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I know all about Blake. We'll reverse course. I'm open to whatever works for committee members.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We're going back to his hometown, Olds. We'll start in B.C., then go to Alberta, Ontario, Montreal, and Halifax. We'll end there. Commercial flights are what our clerks have looked into as being the more economical choice.

Mr. Scott Simms: Did you mention Olds?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Olds, yes, in Alberta. That will be the rural community, and in B.C. we're doing an indigenous community.

The Chair: Tsawwassen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Is the idea for Vancouver just Tsawwassen or the whole—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We're doing one location per stop and then trying to have—and you can weigh in on this now—something similar to what we did on electoral reform. We'll have expert witnesses come before us and have a panel of whoever is going to present in the more formal presentation. Then, immediately following that, without much gap or interruption, for whoever is there and would like to—

● (1600)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Get a couple of minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: —get a couple of minutes in, we'd have them weigh in. That would concentrate the meeting to three or four hours, and then we can move on to our next location.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Ruby and I are experts on how to set these things up.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We saw 18 of them.

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): What were you studying?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Something.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Something that I'm sure won't come up on this tour at all.

The Chair: We have a list. Mr. Nater, you were next on the list.

Mr. John Nater: No.

The Chair: Mr. Graham.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I don't have anything.

The Chair: Mr. Garrison is gone.

Ms. Tassi, you are on the list.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I have a couple of things to clarify.

First of all, I heard $100,000 more, but can we get some information on cost?

Ms. Jill McKenny: Absolutely.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: The cost of commercial versus charter.

Ms. Jill McKenny: The cost of the commercial flights would be $146,593.20.

The cost with a charter would be $249,668.60.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Are you satisfied that with this order, with these places, and with the timing that we can do commercial, and it would be satisfactory?

Ms. Jill McKenny: It seems feasible knowing that you're only wanting to meet for three hours. We would likely be able to be there by 1 p.m. and leave by 4 p.m., so that gives the three-hour chunk.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I appreciate the challenge that you have, and I'm thankful for the work that you're doing.

I'm wondering if we could get clarification, because the timing is so tight, in terms of what other information you need logistically to make this happen, and whether we should consider giving the chair some discretion. You're saying you think you can make it happen, but if something comes up and there's a problem with one of the legs of the journey, I'm going to propose that we give the chair the authority to make a decision. Timing is tight. I don't know that we're going to have an opportunity to get back together because next week is when we're beginning to travel.

It's those two things, the logistics you need and, of course, at the committee level, about the authority for the chair.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Right, so what we require from you are the names of the travellers, of course, and where they'll be flying from to join the committee at the first stop and where they'll be flying to at the end.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: I'm thinking as well of the logistics of arranging the actual places where we're going to go...spaces and those sorts of things. The details...for example, witness lists. Do we need to have the witness list today in order to arrange for the witnesses to be available at the time that we're travelling?

If you can, that will help us, because we want to make this happen, and we just need the information that you need.

The Clerk: The witness names or witness list would be helpful as early as possible. Obviously, we won't be able to communicate with them until we know whom the committee wants to meet with.

Once I get them from you, I have to have some sense, too, of how the lists are going to be balanced for each meeting space. Are we going to try to have a dozen witnesses at each location? Are we talking about a two-hour formal meeting? Are you thinking two panels of four or five?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: More than that gets a bit crowded. The witnesses don't get to talk much and we don't get to ask them much.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: Yes.

The Clerk: Is there a proportion that you'd like to have for each party?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: How do we do it when we're having a witness set of hearings in Ottawa? There's a proportionality to the witnesses when they come.

An hon. member: Uh, oh.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, we have 30 minutes until the votes.

The Chair: We have 30 minutes.

Ms. Filomena Tassi: There's another point. Do you need to know from us the actual location of the places we're going to?

The Chair: It sounds to me as though we've worked that out.

Mr. Blake Richards: We'll have the conversation after that, right?

The Chair: I think we have 30 minutes. Can we stay for a few minutes?

Mr. Blake Richards: You need the committee's permission.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I think we'd better come back after the votes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

The Chair: You don't want to stay for 10 minutes?

Mr. Blake Richards: No.

The Chair: Okay, we'll come back after the vote.

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

● (1650)

The Chair: Welcome back to meeting 107. I forget who had the floor when we left.

Ruby.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I honestly don't remember. I would like the floor once we move on from the travel, but I think we were in the middle of—

The Chair: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The last thing Filomena asked was whether there is anything we can do to facilitate the planning of the travel. Are there any other questions you have? I don't think facility location was one of them, but having witness lists would probably be a big one.

By when would you need those from us?

The Clerk: I agree that with the work Jill's team has done and the discussion we had here, we have a pretty good sense and are confident that we'll be able to move west to east and hit all the major centres.

The witness lists are very important to me. I think that's the big piece right now, if our meetings are going to be successful. We need to get people before the committee in those locations, so it's as soon as possible, please.

The Chair: The deadline was today. We need lists for those communities. The clerk doesn't want the House of Commons to be embarrassed, to have a meeting at which there are no witnesses. I looked at the Liberals' list, and almost all their witnesses were from the Ottawa area. That is not that helpful.

● (1655)

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'm wondering, through you to the clerk, about organizing our witness lists, if we can, by region, just to focus the mind. We have a few folks in Halifax, Toronto, etc. Now that we've chosen the cities....

The Chair: Yes, it would make sense.

Mr. Blake Richards: It's one thing to put a witness list together overall for a study and another thing to put one together for specific locations. We may have a list now that you can look at to see whether there are a couple we could pull from here or there that would fit a particular location, but we may all now need to go back to see who we know in a particular area and really didn't think of before who would still be a good witness. That probably means the lists we now have need to be augmented for that purpose.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think that's also why Filomena raised the issue of giving the chair some discretion and authority, especially if things happen as they popped up on electoral reform, whereby somebody can't make it and then we can substitute somebody in without having to reconvene the committee in order to figure out how to do it, as long as there weren't some big veto.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's a different issue from what I'm talking about, though. I think we're talking about giving the initial lists of witnesses. I don't disagree that, if one person drops out, the chair and the clerk should have the ability to slot X into that spot in the schedule. That's different from their coming up with an entire list themselves.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No, all the parties should help in doing that.

The Clerk: I would say from my point of view that, tomorrow being Wednesday, if we're having meetings on Monday, it's probably important that I start calling people tomorrow for Monday.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: So should it be tomorrow at 9:00 a.m.?

The Chair: It could be today.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We could give you our initial lists. We can do it in tranches. We have some that we're winnowing down.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, and we could just keep updating them as we have them.

The Clerk: Yes, and prioritize them, if you could. Monday's meetings will be in Vancouver. If you could, as early as possible, get me your witnesses for Vancouver, the rest of them, hopefully, will come shortly thereafter.

The Chair: If there's any community for which we don't have any witnesses, it's problematic to leave it on the list. It would be a bit of an embarrassment to spend tens of thousands of dollars to go for no witnesses.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: It's a very rushed way to do it, for sure, but we'll do our best.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: May I throw something out there, if I have a second? An idea to put out there for witnesses while we travel would be to invite returning officers in the riding we're going to and nearby ridings, who have the most on-the-ground experience with the administration of elections.

The Chair: Can you get those names from Elections Canada?

The Clerk: Are you talking about one location specifically or all locations?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I think it would be helpful to have a couple across the country, if we're short on witnesses in an area, to invite the returning officers in that area. It's an idea I am putting out there.

Especially in Halifax, to get the ones from rural Nova Scotia and the area would be very helpful, because we'd want someone with lots of experience in administering elections in the areas we're affecting.

The Clerk: Okay.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I know that's rather broad.

The Clerk: There was some discussion during the suspension as well about whether Tsawwassen was the ideal location for Vancouver or whether it would be better to be in Vancouver proper.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: I want us to err on the side of leaving the city.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you have a comment about the location in B.C.?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, I was saying earlier that, especially for the witness side of things, if we're looking to have a panel or two, for people who don't know Vancouver, going out to Tsawwassen means going out past the airport away from the two major universities. Tsawwassen wouldn't have been my first pick necessarily, because it's near the airport on the opposite side from the town. It would be not quite like going from Toronto to Barrie, but mentally it would be. In other words, we're going to lose witnesses, if we go that way.

There are reserves, as the chair would know, in Vancouver. There is the Musqueam and the Tsleil-Waututh, which is on the north shore. The Musqueam reserve land is UBC. It's not going on what most people.... It's just that logistically, if you ask a UBC professor to come out to Tsawwassen, it's an hour each way for them, minimum.

I think we're going to just not get people, as compared with their getting on the SkyTrain and going to this other place.

● (1700)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

The Chair: Is it possible to have another location in Vancouver?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Remember that in Vancouver we have the whole day. It's the only place we have the whole day, because we arrive the night before. If you really were hooked on Tsawwassen, you could do it for an hour or two in the morning to meet with community leaders, then do the Vancouver part.

The Clerk: One of the advantages for us in planning is that we knew the that facility in Tsawwassen was available on the Friday. We had done some preliminary research into that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Oh, I see.

The Clerk: There is flexibility here, so we can look at other venues in Vancouver, and if for some reason we can't find a suitable spot—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: If you have trouble, just let us know.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Who wouldn't want to come out to speak to a prestigious committee like PROC?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, but you want to reduce the barriers, if you can.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Especially academics, no?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Most of them like it, as you know.

The Chair: Okay, we'll try to find another location and another first nation in Vancouver, one that's closer—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: There are three or four that are much more accessible.

Were you on the one when we went to...? No, the committee wasn't with me that time.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I went everywhere.

The Clerk: Maybe, Mr. Cullen, you could include the first nations that are in Vancouver on your witness list. That would be helpful.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Yes, that's no problem. I'll do it right now.

The Clerk: Jill had one other comment that she wanted to make generally about logistics.

Ms. Jill McKenny: It's about the commercial flights. Keep in mind that the longer we wait to book those commercial flights, the fewer possibilities there are. There may be a possibility that we'd have to split the group from one city to another, but we'll do our best to keep everyone together.

If we can please receive the travelling members' names and their city of departure and return city as quickly as possible, it would help us with our planning.

The Chair: I think we have their names.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: You want witness lists and names today, at least by the end of the day. We'll try to do that for you.

The Clerk: There's another aspect. Given that we are going to be holding open-mike sessions, I was wondering whether the committee would be open to giving the chair the discretion to approve tweets that could go out to advertise or announce that the committee is going to be visiting specific cities across Canada.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Does that sound okay with the committee to advertise on Twitter that we're coming?

The Chair: Is there any objection to it?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We did it last time.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, we went beyond that for that one.

Now that we have a lot of the travel component out of the way and the logistics, as I said earlier, all of this is contingent upon our getting through this piece of legislation. That's really important to me and the Liberals on this committee, so I'd like to move the motion that was put before the committee yesterday regarding the timing of getting through the legislation.

Would you like me to read the motion into the record?

Mr. Blake Richards: On a point of order, this is my own fault, but I missed a little chunk of what was happening here, and we seem to have leaped somewhere else. I want to catch up, to be frank.

On the travel stuff, where did we end up, just so that I'm clear on it? Then I can hear what has been said here.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The liaison committee is going to be in here at 5:30. They're scheduled to meet. That's why we're trying to get this all done, so that we can move on all the plans for tomorrow.

We ended up with—

Mr. Blake Richards: I can probably help there. With the motion you have, you're probably not going to be done at 5:30 anyway, so you might as well let me find out what's going on with travel.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The end of the travel debate was that we are going to go the route you said. You have already heard what towns we're going to. Witness lists are to be submitted as soon as possible, preferably by the end of today, if not, by 9:00 a.m. tomorrow.

As well, we need the names by the end of the day of everyone in your party who is going to be on the trip. To the best of their ability, they're going to make sure we travel all together, but some of our flights may be split.

I think that's where we ended up.

● (1705)

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not trying to stall here at all, because that's not an issue, if I wanted to do so.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blake Richards: As you already know, I would not be able to do the whole trip, for example. I believe one of my colleagues is in that same boat as well. I don't know whether there are others.

What are the plans? If someone has to be there for part of the week and we substitute somebody else in, there is no issue with that, is there? With the travel, there are no issues in accommodating that?

Ms. Jill McKenny: It complicates things when we have substitution of members. It adds a layer to our logistical planning.

Mr. Blake Richards: We need to let you know that as soon as we can, then.

Ms. Jill McKenny: —along with which city you are leaving from and returning to.

Mr. Blake Richards: Do you have a draft? I know it might not be finalized and that you wouldn't want us to live by it as gospel at this point, but do you have some kind of rough draft that you could forward? As soon as you can give us that.... I, for example, would have to make a decision on Wednesday, my last day, or part of Thursday.

If I could get that as soon as possible—

Ms. Jill McKenny: Do you mean a draft itinerary?

Mr. Blake Richards: —it would allow me to tell you sooner when I would have to have the substitutes come in, for example.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Right.

Mr. Blake Richards: Even if it's not finalized, if you have something in draft, it would be helpful.

Ms. Jill McKenny: We haven't started to build an itinerary. We're just finalizing our understanding of your requirements. Certainly, though, the idea is to be in the cities that were mentioned and in that order, if that helps at all, or—

Mr. Blake Richards: The rough times when we'll be travelling is what I'm getting at, so that we can have some sense as to what makes sense for what a substitute would want to know.

Ms. Jill McKenny: Right.

Mr. Blake Richards: Could we get that whenever you can send it?

The other thing, Mr. Chair, is that you and I had a conversation about your availability and my availability, as the only chair and vice-chair. We don't have a second vice-chair at the present time. Given that we've arrived at this, which might create a bit of an odd situation.... I think there is a standard practice anyway, but I don't know that it happens automatically. It may be something we have to pass a motion to do, or something to that effect, which is that when the committee is travelling, there wouldn't be any motions undertaken or heard.

Is it not correct that we would have to pass a motion for that rule to be in effect?

What is the appropriate thing for us to do, and is it something the committee is interested in doing? I think it makes sense.

The Chair: Yes, what he is talking about is that I too probably can't make Friday, so the committee would have to propose an interim chair for that day, because there is no chair, vice-chair, or other vice-chair.

Mr. Blake Richards: Related to that is the idea that typically, when committees travel, we don't entertain motions and things like that—

The Chair: Does that require a motion?

Mr. Blake Richards: I think we have to prove that this is the case. Maybe we would want to pass some kind of motion to that effect. I don't know what's required to do it.

Maybe the clerk could give us some advice on this.

The Clerk: If the committee agrees to the idea that motions not be entertained while the committee is travelling, that would certainly suffice.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I can add that to my motion.

Mr. Blake Richards: You may want to deal with that part now, because I think we're going to have a bit longer issue with your motion, to be honest.

If you want to deal with travel, then at least you know you can start to work on those arrangements. You're going to have a bit more problem with your motion.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I don't see the point. I can just add it to that motion altogether anyway, because it's all part of one piece, isn't it? Do we move forward—?

Mr. Blake Richards: That tells us where the government stands, then, so that's fine.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

Basically, where we stand is.... I can—

Mr. Blake Richards: You want to get by your end date on your.... You get to ram it through, basically.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No, not ram it through, but we want some reassurances from your side that we're not going to come back and then be at a standstill, but that we're going to be making progress and moving forward. I would hate to spend all this money getting input from people across the country and then not be moving forward with this legislation.

That's where I am on it. The Liberal members on this committee just want some reassurance. We can talk about maybe shifting dates here and there, but right now, this is how I see it fitting best.

We want to move on this. We want to make sure that in the next election Canadians are able to vote, that Canadians have access to our elections. We want to make sure about all of those things. To do so, we have heard from the CEO that we need to move on this.

You'll probably respond by saying we should have done it even quicker, and of course we should have, perhaps, but this is where we are right now. In order to move it forward, we need to do something.

I'm not really comfortable going on the road without knowing that the money spent and all the input we get from witnesses on the road is going to be useful to us when we get back to Ottawa to do the clause-by-clause, to present amendments, and also to use that feedback to bounce ideas around regarding all the submissions we may get from our colleagues.

This is where my mindset is, and that's why I'm doing this. It's not out of any kind of unwillingness on my part; it's just so that we know this is going to go somewhere and that we can get this legislation moving.

Is now a good time to read it?

● (1710)

The Chair: Yes, why don't you read the motion that you are proposing.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: There are several separate paragraphs to the motion.

Number one is that notwithstanding any motion adopted by the committee in relation to the submission of proposed amendments to bills, the members of the committee, as well as members who are not part of a caucus represented on the committee, submit to the clerk of the committee all their proposed amendments to the bill no later than the end of day on June 8, 2018, in both official languages, and that these be distributed to members.

I'll summarize. This is basically allowing all the parties and all of those who are not represented here to make submissions.

Number two is that the clerk of the committee write immediately to each member of Parliament who is not a member of a caucus represented on the committee to inform them of the beginning of the consideration of the bill by the committee and to invite them to prepare and submit any proposed amendments to the bill for the committee's consideration prior to the deadline, which is June 8, 2018.

Number three is that the committee commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-76 on Tuesday, June 12, 2018, at 11:00 a.m.

Number four is that 80 or more suggested amendments are received, the chair may limit debate on each clause to a maximum of five minutes per party per clause.

Number five is that should the committee not complete its clause-by-clause consideration of the bill by 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday, June 12, 2018, all remaining amendments submitted to the committee shall be deemed moved, the chair shall put the question forthwith and successively, without further debate, on all remaining clauses and proposed amendments, as well as each and every question necessary to dispose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, as well as all questions necessary to report the bill to the House, order that it be reprinted, and order the chair to report the bill to the House as soon as possible.

We can say as number six that no substantive motions should be passed while the committee is on travel.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Or "entertained".

Ms. Ruby Sahota: —or "entertained", sure, or—

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: The member proposing it—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, "proposed"; I think I said "passed".

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: You can entertain it, but you can't move it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: "Moved".

The Chair: Is there discussion on that motion?

Mr. Nater.

Mr. John Nater: It's changed slightly from what we had last night, in terms of the travel portion. That's not actually mentioned in the motion. Should travel be separately dealt with?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, it can be. That was just a portion. I mean, the travel itself is all together. The travel is contingent on our having reassurance that we're moving forward.

But you're talking about—

Mr. John Nater: But this is the motion—

The Chair: Mr. Nater, I will do a motion on the travel.

Mr. John Nater: No, it's just that the original motion that we circulated had that first clause, so that's been—

An hon. member: It ought to be in one motion.

Mr. Blake Richards: It's not, though.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Will this be number seven of what she just said?

Mr. Blake Richards: There already was a paragraph seven that was added.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No, it was paragraph six.

Mr. Blake Richards: Let's give them some time to figure out what their motion is.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Here we go. I'll rearrange paragraphs six and seven. Number six would be travel. Travel arrangements and logistics discussed in committee are contingent upon the acceptance of the prior clauses.

Paragraph seven would be that no substantive motions be moved while on travel.

● (1715)

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Chair, this is a point of clarification again.

It isn't that the government wants to deal with these things together. It wants to deal with them separately, but it wants to deal with everything else first and then the travel second.

Is that what I'm hearing? You're not including it in the motion.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I just did. I added it as paragraphs six and seven.

Mr. Blake Richards: You said it was "contingent upon", but you haven't indicated in the motion what the travel would be. That would mean we would be dealing with it separately following the motion.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I mean the travel plans as discussed and agreed upon by the committee today. We were, so far, moving through consensus on the cities we wanted to hit, the locations, and how the logistics would work.

Mr. Blake Richards: My understanding was that we hadn't agreed upon them, because you were indicating that you felt we had to agree to everything else at the same time.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, that's why I'm saying.... This is all laid out. Now we have discussed in committee, with what I believe was consensus about the locations and the logistics of the travel. I'm saying in paragraph six that we accept—I accept—those travel plans —

Mr. Blake Richards: Well, they have to be agreed to in order to be accepted, though, and they're not, either before the motion or in it, are they?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Paragraph six of the motion would be that the travel plans we have discussed today would be contingent upon the reassurance of all these prior five paragraphs.

Mr. Blake Richards: Can I ask the advice of our clerk on this one? Is this an acceptable form for a motion or is it better for the plans to be reiterated...?

My understanding was that we were asking to agree to the travel, and government members were saying that they wouldn't do that at this time, which therefore means that we haven't agreed to the travel. Now we're saying some vague thing about something we discussed or whatever—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We haven't agreed on whether we'll go on the road—

Mr. Blake Richards: Is that an acceptable form of a motion, or is it better for the motion to actually outline what the travel would in fact look like?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: We haven't agreed whether we're going to go on the road, but if we go on the road, what we have just discussed would be the travel plans.

Mr. Blake Richards: Somehow or other, there has to be agreement of the committee to do that, and it's not happening in the motion right now.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay, if you could, please clarify.

The Chair: You've asked the clerk. He can go ahead and answer.

The Clerk: I think I understand the question, and what I am understanding from Ms. Sahota's presentation is that the travel component—

I don't know whether you have a copy of the motion in front of you.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes, I have.

The Clerk: What is in number one would be slightly different, based on our conversation, and would now find itself in number six, if I'm understanding correctly.

Mr. Blake Richards: That's not my understanding. Maybe we need to clarify that, because my understanding is that.... It seems to me that they're pulling this from the motion. They're not amending it or anything.

The Chair: Andy.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Mr. Chair, last night we reached agreement on the travel, and then today we are looking, as Ms. Sahota has very clearly laid out, to make sure that the travel is not in vain, which it would be if we didn't have the remainder of the elements of the motion in place.

It's a single motion consisting of multiple interdependent parts, and the travel cannot be separated from the remainder of the motion. The travel was agreed to last night, so we've already given the—

Mr. Blake Richards: No, it wasn't, so—

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Well, we haven't agreed to the budget.

Mr. Blake Richards: —we have to agree to it.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: We haven't agreed to the budget; that's true.

Mr. Blake Richards: You have to agree one way or the other to the travel, and it's not in your motion and it hasn't been agreed otherwise.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: It is in the motion. It's very clearly in the motion.

Mr. Blake Richards: No, it's not. That's the point. It's not in there, so you put the travel in or do it now. You can't have it both ways.

The Chair: Do you want them to put in the five cities and that kind of stuff?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Put it in, yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: Whatever you're doing, put the travel in the motion, if you're going to do it, because everybody else wanted to agree with the travel separately, and the government said no, we can't do that. Now they won't put it in their motion, either. It's as though they don't have a clue what they're doing over there.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I did put it in. I put it in at the end portion, rather than having it up front like you guys had it yesterday. Forgive me a little bit. I wasn't here yesterday, but I still think it's incorporated within the same ideas—

Mr. Blake Richards: [*Inaudible—Editor*] clear what you're doing.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: —and the ideas are within those separate clauses. The travel is a portion of it. We can lay out the cities that we just decided on, and the indigenous community, and we can put that into the motion in number six.

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not comfortable discussing motions unless there's an agreement and we know what the actual text of the motion—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Well, we know where we're headed anyway.

You're not comfortable with giving any reassurance. Would you provide some reassurance that we're going to come back and that we're going to go through the legislation?

● (1720)

The Chair: He just wants to have in the motion the names of the cities that we're going to.

Mr. Blake Richards: We're the ones asking to actually go through the legislation. You're the ones wanting to ram it through. There's no problem with getting us to go through the legislation.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's why I put under number six that the proposed travel—

Mr. Blake Richards: Well, I don't believe it's appropriate to discuss a motion that is undefined. Tell us what your motion is in relation to travel.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Blake Richards: We have not agreed to that, so put it in the motion.

Mr. Andy Fillmore: [*Inaudible—Editor*] chance to approve it.

Mr. Blake Richards: No, it's not, because you guys refused to agree to it, so you have to put it in your motion. You can't have it both ways.

The Chair: Read it in.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. Still going in the same order that I had laid out earlier.... I think you can go back to the record, but anyway, number one was—

Would you like me to reread it all so that it's clarified?

The Chair: Just read the travel clause.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay.

The travel clause, I guess, would go from being number one to number six from what you guys got yesterday, right? It would be that the committee travel across Canada from June 4, 2018, until June 8, 2018, and the clerk be authorized to organize travel with meetings in communities in the following regions: Atlantic Canada...and I think we should specify all the communities that we've just named today in numbered order...and that the travel budget be approved.

A voice: As described....

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I don't know [*Inaudible—Editor*]. You can say "as described". No, it's not.... It's Vancouver rather than.... This is an estimate, right? We can be clearer in number six about the cities that we've mentioned, the locations we've mentioned, and then add "and that the travel budget be approved."

Mr. Blake Richards: We're being asked to debate a motion that no one can even tell us the wording of.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'll just read it out to you again, Blake. I mean —

Mr. Blake Richards: What I would require is to actually hear the wording of the motion not these vague concepts that are being thrown around here.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's not a vague concept. We've sat here for two hours and discussed—

Mr. Blake Richards: It is.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No. The cities, the—

Mr. Blake Richards: If you want to pass a motion—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: —journey, which way—

Mr. Blake Richards: This is the way you guys want to do things. This is the way you guys want to do it.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: This is how I want to do it, so I'll read it out to you once more.

Mr. Blake Richards: If you want to do it that way, give us a motion that is properly worded so we know what we're dealing with and what we're debating.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Hopefully you'll be able to understand this. I'll read it.

Number one is that notwithstanding any motion adopted by committee in relation to the submission of proposed amendments to bills, the members of the committee, as well as members who are not part of a caucus represented on the committee, shall submit to the clerk of the committee all of the proposed amendments to the bill no later than end of day on June 8, 2018, in both official languages, and that these be distributed to members.

Number two is that the clerk of the committee write immediately to each member of Parliament who is not a member of the caucus represented on the committee to inform them of the beginning of consideration of the bill by the committee, and to invite them to prepare and submit any proposed amendments to the bill for the committee's consideration prior to the deadline.

Number three is that the committee commence clause-by-clause consideration of Bill C-76 on Tuesday, June 12, 2018, at 11 a.m.

Number four is that if 80 or more suggested amendments are received, the chair may limit debate on each clause to a maximum of five minutes per party, per clause.

Number five is should the committee not complete its clause-by-clause consideration of the bill by 9 p.m. on Tuesday, June 12, 2018, all remaining amendments submitted to the committee shall be deemed moved, the chair shall put the question forthwith and successively without further debate on all remaining clauses and proposed amendments, as well as each and every question necessary to dispose of clause-by-clause consideration of the bill, as well as all questions necessary to report the bill to the House, order that it be reprinted, and order the chair to report the bill to the House as soon as possible.

Number six is that the committee travel across Canada from June 4, 2018 until June 8, 2018, and the clerk be authorized to organize travel with meetings in communities in the following regions, as discussed in committee: 1. Atlantic Canada; 2. Québec; 3. Ontario; 4. Prairies—or I guess Alberta——and, 5. British Columbia.

Then, in brackets, we can put the specific locations that we're going to. I would do that, and then end with that the travel budget for the required travel be approved.

Then we have number seven which is that no substantive motions be passed in committee while the committee is on travel.

● (1725)

Mr. Blake Richards: Your number six is as worded in the original proposal—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Number one.

Mr. Blake Richards: Just let me finish. It's number one in the original proposal with the following changes: in number four, you're changing "Prairies" to "Alberta" and—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes.

Mr. Blake Richards: —you're striking everything after British Columbia?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, but then we're adding that the corresponding travel budget be approved.

The Chair: Is there any debate on the motion?

Mr. Blake Richards: That would put the committee in a place where it would be deciding to approve a travel budget without knowing the amount of it.

The Chair: I can tell you the amount.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes. Present it to us.

The Chair: It's $150,993.

Mr. Blake Richards: Would that change depending on the final...? I don't know how that works.

The Chair: The clerk will tell you the amount.

The Clerk: The draft budget that was distributed had a total of $146,593.20. After some consultation with Jill, we decided that starting in Vancouver would add a night in Vancouver that wouldn't have been there had we gone from Ottawa to Halifax in the morning. The new total has an additional $4,400 added to it, so $150,993.20 is the draft budget.

Mr. Blake Richards: I just thought in looking at it that some of the cities were listed differently from what we ended up deciding on, so I wasn't sure if that changed it considerably or not. Okay.

The Chair: Is there debate on the motion?

Mr. Blake Richards: There was a new number seven as well, something about the....

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Number seven is what you pointed out earlier, which I think is a very valid point, that no substantive motions be moved while the committee is on travel.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

The Chair: Is there debate on the motion?

Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I believe Mr. Genuis wanted to be on the list next as well. He mentioned that to me.

In relation to the motion—

Mr. Chris Bittle: Sorry, Chair, but on a point of order, I had my hand up to speak next and it was interjected with someone else wanting to speak.

Mr. Blake Richards: I simply asked that he be put on the list. That's all. I was not indicating that nobody else could speak.

The Chair: Okay. We'll go with Mr. Richards, Mr. Bittle, Mr. Genuis, and Mr. Nater.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, despite any characterizations that they've tried to make otherwise, we're in this situation because this government is trying to change the election laws of this country, and they're trying to do it in such a way that certainly there is much question as to whether this benefits themselves. Also, in doing that, they're trying to ram it through Parliament.

If you recall, when we were in the very short period of time that was given for debate in the House of Commons at second reading, after one hour of debate this government decided to move a notice of time allocation. That means shutting down debate: there was one hour for debate on the legislation that governs our elections in this country, that decides the rules by which the people of Canada choose their representatives in Parliament.

This government somehow believes that one hour of debate is enough time on something of that significance. Of course, that was not something that was acceptable to those of us in the opposition; however, they moved time allocation, and in the debate that occurred for 30 minutes thereafter, the Minister of Democratic Institutions was questioned numerous times—

● (1730)

The Chair: I have a point of order, Blake. We have to tell the subcommittee of the liaison committee.... They're ready to either meet or go home. We have to give them some direction. There are four speakers on the list.

They could meet first thing in the morning, but we have to give them some direction. They're all sitting here. We can't keep them for.... We don't know how long people are going to talk, but there are three people on the list.

Mr. Blake Richards: Well, I have a lot to say, I can tell you that, and I think that until this government starts listening they might not want to make too many plans.

The Chair: Okay. We'll—

Mr. Chris Bittle: On that point, it seems that the Conservatives are in the mood to discuss the issue, and perhaps it's wise to just let the—

The Chair: To let the subcommittee go...?

Is anyone opposed? Okay, the subcommittee can—

Mr. Blake Richards: Well, I'm not sure. What are you asking when you're asking if anyone is opposed?

The Chair: To letting the subcommittee go....

Mr. Blake Richards: I believe that the committee should meet and approve travel for this committee so that we can hear from Canadians, but this government is saying "unless we're allowed the ability to also ram the bill through, we won't allow that". I certainly don't think that the committee should not meet. I think they should, but the government is refusing to allow that to happen.

I don't know what you do, Mr. Chair [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: There's one person who thinks the subcommittee should stay.

Is there anyone else?

Mr. Blake Richards: It's probably [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I agree with Blake.

The Chair: Members on this side...?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: May I speak? It's on this issue.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I don't think it's very kind to them to have to sit through....

I see that they have a lot to say and, as they have a right to say it, this could go on for I don't know how long.

You say you have "a lot to say". Does that mean an hour? Two hours? Would you keep a subcommittee waiting for that long, just sitting here with no resolution in sight?

I've proposed my motion.

Mr. Blake Richards: Nobody wants to keep them sitting—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Unless we're ready to vote on it, have a conclusion, and tell the subcommittee whether we're going or not going, then....

Mr. Blake Richards: The only people who want to keep them sitting here is the government, because the government wants to—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No. My vote would be to let them go if this is not going to resolve any time soon.

Mr. Blake Richards: The government does not want to approve travel. If the government approved travel, they could deal with that.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: As the chair has pointed out, they could meet in the morning, so we definitely *are* interested in moving forward with the study on this legislation, and with travel, hopefully, but if we don't have some resolution for them any time soon to decide on, I just do not feel right about having members of the subcommittee sit here and listen to all of this discussion that we're about to have.

The Chair: The clerk is reminding me that we can't actually control the subcommittee. The subcommittee can decide on their own. They can get together and decide what they want to do.

It looks like we're going to be here for a while. We'll let Blake carry on with his speech.

Mr. Blake Richards: Again, here we are. It's because this government, after a one-hour debate, moved notice of time allocation on this very important piece of legislation that determines how people choose who will represent them in Parliament. Then, when they did their time allocation and they moved it....

For anyone who isn't familiar with parliamentary language, it basically means they shut down the debate in the House of Commons on a piece of legislation that determines how we choose our representatives in Parliament, trying to rig the system in their own favour. They didn't want to allow the opposition to have a chance to make points about that, to show how foolish some of the things they were attempting to do were, or to point out that they are serving own interests, as they have done so many times in the past. Rather than allow that, they said, well, let's just shut down debate.

When that happened, and members of the opposition questioned the Minister of Democratic Institutions about this heavy-handed, undemocratic approach her government was taking, the minister gave the same response over and over again; she didn't say it just once. She said that she felt the best place to have a full debate, to really hear out the issues and get the different perspectives, was at this committee.

That was the excuse that was given at that time. That was the rationale that was given. We all knew that this was utter and complete nonsense. It was not true.

I could use other words, Mr. Chair, but we're in a parliamentary setting here, so I won't do that. I know that there are words you would probably hear on occasion in the streets of your hometown, as I would in mine, but I won't use them here. All Canadians know what I would like to say, or what I would like to call this.

It was nonsense—we'll call it that—and we knew it was, which this government is just in the middle of proving. They're demonstrating it. They're showing us that what she said was untrue, that it was not, in fact, the truth. They can characterize it however they'd like, but if Canadians were to take a look at this motion that's been presented, they would see a government trying to ram through this piece of legislation, and ram it through this committee as well.

What typically happens, just for the benefit of those who might be following this committee from outside this parliamentary precinct—I'm sure there are some—is that when a bill comes before a committee, the committee will make some determination as to how best to study it. They will ensure, however, that there are opportunities for Canadians who wish to be heard at the committee to come forward and bring their perspectives. That gives members the opportunity to question those individuals and try to gather more from those perspectives, or to challenge those perspectives, if they wish. The goal of all of this is to give us, as parliamentarians, the ability to properly weigh out the pros and cons of the various parts of the legislation.

This legislation is 350 pages. That's a pretty big piece of legislation. I think it would only make sense that there would be a number of different expert perspectives that we could draw from. There would need to be some full examination and discussion about what those things mean or what changes they will in fact enact in our elections legislation and in other consequential acts that might be amended. In doing that, there may be unintended consequences. There may be things that the government hadn't really considered, when it was making those changes, would have an impact.

● (1735)

I'll go down a bit of a rabbit trail just for a second here, to give a good example. There are a number of changes in this legislation—and if my memory serves me correctly, I'll give you a few examples, but I don't have the paper right in front of me, although I'm sure I could find it if you wanted me to be more precise.

The Ontario government not too long ago approved some changes to their election law, and some of those changes are similar in nature or affect the same parts of election law, I guess, for lack of a better way of putting it, that the legislation the federal government has brought forward contemplates doing. A future registry of electors is one of those things. There are some changes to the third party regime and how that is treated in Ontario. Those are a couple of examples and there are others.

In this legislation, there are similar changes or changes to the same parts of electoral law, and so, as I've argued before, I think it would be wise for this committee to hear those perspectives. I raised this with the minister when she appeared before the committee this week. I asked her if she felt it was important to learn from the experiences of others, if she felt that it was important to make decisions based on evidence, and not surprisingly, I would imagine for anyone, she agreed with me that that was a wise thing to do, until I asked her whether we should actually apply those things to this study and hear about the experiences of others and gather evidence. Then, of course, her tune changed a little, much as it changed after she was able to pass and ram through the time allocation motion about how important it was for this committee to have a chance to have a full debate. Her tune changed then too.

Suddenly now, she has the government's representatives here on this committee saying, "Oh, no, we can't possibly do that. Why would we want to have a full debate? We want to ram this thing through." There, again, her tune changed, and we went from her thinking it was important to hear evidence and important to learn from the experiences of others to suddenly those things not being so important to her when it meant that we would hear about the experiences of those who are in the middle of an election right now. That will end on June 7, voting day for the election here in Ontario. We're just days away from that, so why not wait a few more days and have the opportunity to hear from those experts, whether they be Elections Ontario or others who have been involved in the Ontario election and who these changes affected, to ask them what they learned from their experiences having run through an election with some of these changes? Maybe we don't want to repeat some of those mistakes if mistakes were made. I don't know—maybe there haven't been any, but if there were, why would we want to repeat those when we can gain that experience and that wisdom from those who have already done that?

It kind of reminds me a bit of when I was a kid. I think we can all relate to this experience. How many times did our parents give us a piece of advice that we just chose to ignore? Of course they always ended up saying, "Well, you know, you should have listened." When you're a kid, you just think you have it all figured out and your parents can't be all that smart. But you realize as you get a little older that your parents actually had the experience and they learned from their own mistakes and they just wanted to see their children not make the same mistakes.

I've been through it now as a parent as well. I have a 22-year-old son at home and I have watched him make some mistakes too. One thing I've learned with him is that the more I try to provide advice, the less he's going to listen, so I have to watch him make those mistakes, and it's frustrating. It's difficult.

● (1740)

What I would say is that it's one thing when you're talking about a parent watching a child make a mistake, maybe negotiating a bad price on a used car he's trying to buy, for example. Sure, it has a little bit of a consequence for him. Maybe it means he can't afford to take his girlfriend out on a date or something. Maybe that's not an insignificant consequence to him, but it's a consequence that's a lot different from what we're talking about here.

What we're talking about here are consequences that will affect our elections and will affect the very way we choose who our representatives are. There's a pretty significant consequence when you get something wrong, so when you have the opportunity to learn from the experience of others, I can't imagine why you wouldn't take that opportunity.

That's one example. I mentioned that it was a rabbit trail I was going down, because where I'm going with all of that is to say that the minister made these excuses back then, and they clearly were just that. They were excuses. Within hours of those excuses being made, we were already getting indications from the government that they were going to just ram it through the committee as well. Their excuse was that this committee was the place for the full debate, all the discussion, and the openness to amendments, which I'll get to in a second in terms of how much of a true statement that really was and how insincere that actually was, because we talked about that with the minister when she was here as well.

Here we are with the government. Let's be absolutely clear about what this motion does. What this motion does is ram it through. The typical process, as I was stating earlier, is that we go through it and we debate these things. We hear from the experts. We hear from people who may be affected and ask, "How would this affect you?" We ask what they think of these changes. Or people who have dealt with these kinds of things....

I guess I'll just point this out here. I notice that on the government side there have been a lot of conversations going on. They're probably just asking what they can do now, because the opposition is not just going to roll over and die here. They're asking, "What do we do now?" I'll point out to them, if they care to listen, that if at any point in time they want to take a walk back from the attempt to ram this through and they're willing to allow proper debate in this committee, they can come over and give me a tap on the shoulder, and I'll be happy to facilitate that. Otherwise, you can plan to get used to my voice for a while.

Some of my colleagues will probably have some things to say too. I'm sure you've noticed that my friend to my right here brought in a whole lot of.... He's probably to my right in a whole lot of ways, really.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Blake Richards: My friend brought in a whole lot of material, and I don't think it was just to read it to himself. Keep that in mind. If at any point in time you want to tap me on the shoulder and say, "Hey, you know what, we realized that it was a mistake to try and ram this through and maybe we will rethink that", I'd be happy to entertain that discussion.

Until then, we'll go back to where I was, which is this motion. As for what actually happens, of course, once you hear these different perspectives and you have a chance to challenge those perspectives, you yourself hopefully will be challenged in your thinking. It's something that we all should do as members of Parliament: hear these different perspectives.

I know that for me, I'm proud to say as a member of Parliament that I certainly feel I've broadened my horizons in terms of the different perspectives I've picked up from all across this country through the various things I've been involved in as a member of Parliament. Whether it be committee proceedings like this one or other parts of your job as a member of Parliament, you're exposed to a lot of different perspectives, and it challenges your way of thinking. I will readily admit that there are things that I thought—I knew—were absolute truths when I first came to this Parliament, and that I realize now weren't completely.... I didn't have it all figured out, as I said earlier, right? I didn't have it all figured out. We learn from these things.

That's why all of these opportunities are a good thing for us as members of Parliament, because at the end of the day our job is to take on legislation that is proposed by the government. It doesn't matter whether you sit on the opposition benches or on the government's side; your job as a member of Parliament is to scrutinize the legislation, scrutinize the actions of the executive branch of the government, ensure that the proper questioning is done on those things, and ensure that those decisions are in the best interests of your constituents and all Canadians.

● (1745)

In order for us to do that job properly, we have to take sometimes the time necessary.... When you talk about a bill of the magnitude of this one, at 350 pages, how many clauses are there in the bill? There are over 400 clauses. When you talk about a bill of that magnitude—350 pages, over 400 clauses—it will take a little bit of time.

That's not me speaking as an opposition member or wanting to delay a piece of legislation. That's me speaking as a member of Parliament, no matter what side of the House I sit on, wanting to ensure that it receives proper scrutiny. I'm not sure how many members of this committee will have a different story than mine on this, but I will readily admit I have not read the entire bill, all 350 pages. I'm working towards that. You'll note that my copy has a lot of—

● (1750)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Well, read it during the committee.

Mr. Blake Richards: —tabs here that have been added to it and dog ears and things like that. I actually have a second copy that I've used as well, so there are some on that as well.

That means there are areas in which I have questions or concerns. Maybe some of them are things I actually really like, because there are some things in there I do like. But, I would think that if we all want to do our jobs properly, we would want to scrutinize that properly. This is a great place to do that, because it's easy for me to read a piece of legislation and say what I like or don't like.

I'll readily confess, again.... Some of the members of this committee are lawyers and are more familiar with the legalese in a bill. I have been a member of Parliament for a little while now, and I've become more familiar with that but I don't pretend that I am an expert in legalese. Being able to get a perspective from officials, as we've been able to do, helps. Being able to get a perspective from those who will come in and who are experts in certain subject matters will help. Getting a perspective from people who are actually going to be directly affected by the legislation will help.

An example is Canadian Forces electors. There are some big changes in terms of that. Maybe we should hear from people in the Canadian Forces or from members of the Canadian Forces who are serving and ask them how they think this will affect them.

For those with disabilities, with regard to where there are some changes, maybe we want to hear from people with different disabilities. Maybe there are unintended consequences. If I recall correctly, in our review of the CEO's report of the last election, which the government likes to claim should form part of the debate on this bill—a suggestion I find baffling, by the way—I can recall us thinking we had some good ideas on certain areas. I won't get into those, because they were from in camera discussions. But then we heard from people who had perspectives on how they were affected by things we were talking about, and we realized that there were unintended consequences to some of those things. Therefore they maybe didn't make the most sense.

That's where we have the opportunity to walk back on those things and say that it might have been a mistake to put them in this piece of legislation, in this example. So, whether we be opposition or government members, our goal should be to try to find what those things are. Maybe there are none—I doubt that, because I have some concerns about this legislation—but if we don't do the proper examination, we'll never know that.

Maybe I can be convinced on some of the things I have concerns about now. Maybe government members on this committee will be convinced that there are certain things in the legislation that they should be taking a closer look at, and maybe even amending or removing from the piece of legislation. It could be the case, but we won't know, and we'll never know, if this motion is to pass, because it just rams it through and doesn't allow that opportunity.

Now, I guess I should probably explain how it doesn't allow that, because people who might be listening are probably wondering that. They're saying, "Is this just an opposition politician talking because he wants to delay things?" I'll prove to you that's not the case.

Here's how I will demonstrate that. What this motion does—and I'll just explain it in brief detail—is to first of all—I guess now it's sixth or seventh of all, because the government wanted to change the order of it for some reason—have us travel across the country next week, which, I'll add, creates a very difficult logistical challenge for those who are trying to arrange this, our clerk and our travel logistics experts.

It doesn't give a lot of time for the witnesses who would probably like to come forward to rearrange schedules, to give real consideration to their thoughts and perspectives on these various things. That being said, that's what it does. It has us travel across Canada next week, which certainly is a good thing. I know it's far less than it should be. I actually thought that the NDP was exceedingly generous, frankly, because this was initially their suggestion—that we travel.

Mr. Cullen had put forward a proposal that was far more extensive than this in terms of travel. I think it would have gone a lot closer toward giving this its proper examination from that perspective; I think there still needs to be meetings here as well.

I say that—I'll briefly go down this rabbit trail, Mr. Chair—as someone who was part of the previous examination of the Elections Act. That was the last time there were changes. At that time, the government asked the opposition how long they wanted to discuss the changes, and that was the timetable the government followed. It meant a lot of hearings.

● (1755)

Mr. John Nater: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, just as a general question of clarification about the motion, we've had it read into the record, but I don't think any of us have a hard copy of the motion, let alone one that's been translated into both official languages. For the benefit of all of us on this committee and those who might be joining our committee throughout the evening, I think it would be helpful if we had that motion in writing in both official languages for committee members.

I'm looking to you for direction, Mr. Chair, on whether that's something that can be done.

The Chair: There is a copy of most of it already. We've made a few minor changes.

To the clerk, is there someone who could get that typed and brought to the committee?

The Clerk: I don't have a translated version of the motion, and I wouldn't be able to distribute it until I had a translated version. If someone could provide me with an electronic version, which I could then send to translation, I could get it to you as soon as possible.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Sure.

The Clerk: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Nater. That was a good point.

We'll go back to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: I kind of forget where I was, Mr. Chair, but I'll pick it up somewhere along my trail.

The Chair: It was about the fact that we were going to travel next week.

Mr. Blake Richards: Right.

As I said, I was part of the committee that studied the last election law changes. The government asked the opposition how long they needed to debate this and to have a hearing on this. That's the way that government proceeded. I mean, we spent just about every evening, for weeks, discussing that legislation in committee. That's the way these things should be discussed. Everyone should be given an opportunity to have a full discussion.

That's not what's happening in this motion. Instead, there would be one week of travel next week—a very quick timeline—and then the government would propose that we come back to Ottawa, not hear from any further witnesses, and not have a chance to have the minister, as was promised to us, come back for another hour. That was promised to us, and it won't happen under this scenario. It won't give us an opportunity to hear from any of the experts here in Ottawa who might have something to say, or give us any further chance to debate or discuss this. Then it would go immediately to clause-by-clause consideration.

For people who aren't familiar with parliamentary procedure, we would take a look at the bill clause by clause. Each clause of the bill would be looked at. There would be an opportunity to have discussion about it and make any amendments that the committee felt were necessary.

This government has said, "Great. We'll let that happen." They have no choice, of course; they have to let that happen, but they're going to put in place a very draconian measure that would put a very strict timeline to that. For every amendment that's being proposed, it would allow five minutes of debate per party. Obviously, the government's intention is to ram this through, so that means probably five minutes total. That's not a lot of debate about something that could have a very significant impact on our elections, as some of these things certainly do.

It means they're breaking their promise, as it seems they're very inclined to do on just about everything. The minister promised full debate and discussion in committee, which is where it should happen. Instead, they're saying, nope, we're just going to ram that sucker right through.

Guess what will probably happen when it goes back to the House of Commons? They'll probably close down debate there too and ram it through. There will be changes made to our elections law, and nobody will really know for sure whether they were sensible or smart or should have been done, because no member of Parliament had the opportunity to give this its proper due and do our job, which is to scrutinize properly and question. It shouldn't matter whether we sit on the government side or the opposition side. We should all have an interest in doing that and in doing what's in the best interest of Canadians. This motion simply does not allow that.

I wanted to say all that, Mr. Chair, just to give people a sense of what we're talking about here and what we're debating. I do have more to say on this. I'll ask that you put my name on the list, and then I will yield the floor.

● (1800)

The Chair: Okay, you're back on the list.

Mr. Bittle.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Richards. That clearly wasn't filibustering as was promised.

I'll be very brief. It's been disappointing throughout this process, because we've been going back and forth for quite some time and we haven't seen any counter-proposals from the Conservatives, nor any offers or witness list or statement as to how long we need to discuss this, how long the Conservative Party requires, or how many witnesses. There's, "Well, show me the offer." I hear Mr. Richards saying, "Well, that's not true. Show me the offer."

We still haven't seen the witness list that was promised for today, but that being said—

Mr. Blake Richards: You're right, I guess. Sorry.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Well left or right, whatever the case, that being said, it's disappointing all around. This is a debate that has to happen. This was an election promise that was made by us and something that we would like to see go through. That being said, it's clear that travel is not going to happen. Again there were no proposals or counter-proposals, and perhaps this is best handled through our steering committee.

At the end of the day, though, I move that the committee do now adjourn.

The Chair: There is a non-debatable, non-amendable motion that the committee do adjourn.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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